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STEPHEN KING



THE GREEN MILE

King sits on Ol' Sparky, flanked by Tom Hanks and director Frank Darabont, going "too far" into his own head

WES CRAVEN
ON SCREAM 3
THE CROW 3
GALAXY QUEST

Volume 31 Number 10



WALTER HILL ON DIRECTING "SUPERNOVA"

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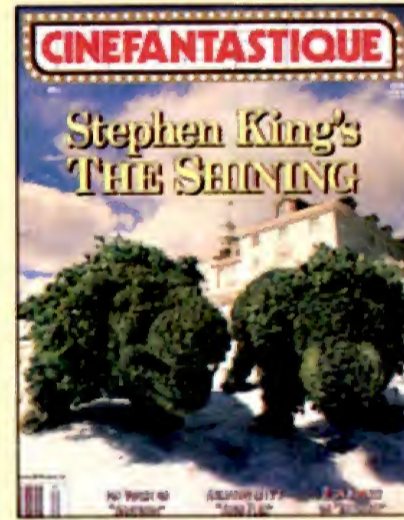
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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

FEBRUARY 2000

22 Dec 99

Happy New Millennium!

Since this issue hits newsstands and your mail box just a few weeks shy of Y2K we thought we'd get that out of the way. And for those keeping track, the issue marks another kind of passage: our first issue was published in November 1970, so we are now entering our 31st year of publication (I guess we'll have to change the ad at left!). Thanks for coming along for the ride. We promise to continue to provide you with the best coverage of horror, fantasy and science fiction films for the next thousand years.

We're very proud to bring you this issue's cover story on **THE GREEN MILE** because, for once, a Stephen King film adaptation looks like it will live up to the promise of the writer's prose. Hollywood correspondent Doug Eby provides an exclusive report of the filming from the set, including interviews with the superb cast as well as screenwriter and director Frank Darabont. Also interviewed are Tom Hanks on his starring role as King's troubled prison guard Paul Edgecombe, and King himself on his own high expectations for the film. Let's hope it cheers his recovery from his well-publicized roadside encounter with an errant vehicle, as it cheers the hearts of audiences who embrace its magical, uplifting story.

Other treats this issue include an advance peek at **SCREAM 3** and an interview with series auteur Wes Craven, who promises to make the third installment the final word on the franchise. You won't be able to celebrate the horror at Christmas, however, since delays in filming have pushed back the film's release date till February 4. Also previewed are **PITCH BLACK**, an outer space monster tale from director David Twohy (**THE ARRIVAL**), which opens February 17, cinematographer Janusz Kaminsky's directing debut, **LOST SOULS**, which opens January 28, and **CROW 3: SALVATION**, the third installment of the popular James O'Barr inspired comic book franchise, bowing March 3. Plus a look at Disney's new IMAX-revamped **FANTASIA** for 1/1/2000!

Frederick S. Clarke



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HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

And who can blame them? Disney is seriously considering the next project from SIXTH SENSE director M. Night Shyamalan, a supernatural feature described as being like SENSE, but in no way a sequel. SENSE producers Kathleen Kennedy, Frank Marshall, and Barry Mendel will be back on board, as will Bruce Willis, who will re-team with DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE co-star Samuel L. Jackson....Meanwhile, Disney is trying to tempt Gerard Depardieu to play co-baddy against Glenn Close in the sequel 102 DALMATIANS. Kevin Lima (TARZAN) will direct....Less luck for Peter Pan, whose animated Disney sequel has been sent back to development. Maybe somebody finally remembered HOOK?

Jeffrey Eastman has been tapped to write the sequel to TRUE LIES. Co-stars Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jamie Lee Curtis, and Tom Arnold are expected to reunite for the project. This may be James Cameron's first film after TITANIC, and in keeping with the progress of his career arc, will be budgeted for the gross national product of Monaco and require the nuclear annihilation of Rhode Island (kidding, just kidding)....Principal photography has started on Warner Bros.' RED PLANET. Val Kilmer and Carrie-Ann Moss play astronauts stranded on Mars....Maybe they can get help from Ernie Contrera, the writer whom Disney has signed to script FORTUNE SON, about the first 16-year-old astronaut....CUBE writer-director Vincenzo Natali has been signed by producer Robert Lantos and his Serendipity Point Films to write and direct SPLICE, a thriller centering on two lovers who are experimenting with crossbreeding species.

Following his penchant for off-beat rolls, John Malkovich stars as Murnau in SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE, a fictional account of the filming of NOSFERATU, which Lion's Gate has picked-up for U.S. release in early 2000. Directed by Elias Merhige from a script by Steve Katz, Willem Dafoe plays actor Max Schreck as a real vampire.

Dougray Scott got caught up in the shooting of MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 2 and had to forfeit the role of Wolverine in Bryan Singer's screen



Willem Dafoe as Max Schreck—a real NOSFERATU—attacks John Malkovich as Murnau in SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE.

version of THE X-MEN. Australian actor Hugh Jackman will suit-up instead, taking his place beside Ian McKellen as Magneto and Patrick Stewart as Professor X.

Those who can, come up with fresh, innovative takes on a genre, such as THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT or THE SIXTH SENSE. Those who can't, capitalize on the trend with...remakes! Coming from Seven Arts: I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF, directed by Anthony Hickox....Preger Entertainment is prepping a mini-series version of THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS—the source story for the classic VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED—and a feature remake of DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. Both will be directed by Tom Holland....The BBC is talking to Impact Pictures about a DR. WHO feature, and may partner up with some of the BLAIR WITCH team for the project. In this version, the T.A.R.D.I.S. will look like an old, abandoned house and the Doctor won't be at all nice.

Adam Sandler goes supernatural (as if anybody could tell) in LITTLE NICKY, about the Devil's son. Harvey Keitel plays pop Satan.... Michael Crichton is giving away the film rights to *Timeline*, his novel about teenagers transported back to the fourteenth century, but only if it's put on a fast-track production schedule. Crichton is allowed to write the first draft of the script (for big bucks), and Richard Donner directs (for more big bucks). Note to potential buyers: you might want to

check out Connie Willis' excellent *The Doomsday Book* first....David "Up With People" Fincher is in preliminary talks to direct THE MEXICAN, about a mobster hunting down a cursed pistol. Brad Pitt would star.

Producer David Heyman bought the rights to the "Harry Potter" books and brought them to Warner Bros. Steve Kloves is finishing up the script. Now the fun part begins: reportedly in contention to direct are Steven Spielberg, Chris Columbus, Jonathan Demme, Rob Reiner, Brad Silberling, and John Huston, who got so caught up in the enthusiasm for the project that he actually *rose from the grave* to pitch for the job....Stanley Kubrick, meanwhile, may be resurrected in

another way if Spielberg moves ahead with plans to helm the late director's long-awaited robot-boy project, *AI*....Warner Bros. is planning a remake of BARBARELLA and is courting Drew Barrymore to star. Hey, why should David Letterman get all the fun?...Joining just about every other actor in the western world who has signed on to Peter Jackson's adaptation of LORD OF THE RINGS are Cate Blanchett, who will play elf queen Galadriel, and Christopher Lee, taking the role of Saruman.

Big genre plans for Sandra Bullock, whose Fortis Films is readying a live-action feature, ALISON'S STARTING TO HAPPEN—about a ghost trying to find the meaning to her life—and two animated projects: an adaptation of William Joyce's NICHOLAS CRICKET, and JINGLE, in which a sarcastic elf attempts to redeem himself by reforming the world's naughtiest girl....Leslie "Never Met a Dead Horse I Couldn't Beat" Nielsen is starring in 2001: A SPACE TRAVESTY, in which he plays a bumbling U.S. marshal (breakout role!) chasing after aliens....Please feel free to contact the Bubble Factory with alternative titles for A FATE TOTALLY WORSE THAN DEATH, about a group of teenagers who experience premature aging as retribution for their bad behavior. Julie Benz, Monica Keena, Nicole Bilderback, and Christopher Lloyd co-star; John Kretchmer directs.

Dan Persons

NEW RELEASES

THE GREEN MILE

Dec 10

Warner Bros. With: Tom Hanks.

Writer-director Frank Darabont (THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION) tries his hand at a second Stephen King adaptation. Page 16.

STUART LITTLE

Dec 17

Sony Pictures. With: Geena Davis, Michael J. Fox, Gene Wilder.

A talking mouse is born to a human family. Page 48.

BICENTENNIAL MAN

Dec 17

Touchstone. With: Robin Williams.

Chris Columbus directs Robin Williams as a robot in an adaptation of Isaac Asimov. Page 54.

GALAXY QUEST

Dec 24

DreamWorks. With: Sigourney Weaver, Tim Allen, Tony Shalhoub.

A wicked parody of the STAR TREK phenomenon. Page 8

SUPERNOVA

Jan 14

MGM. With: James Spader, Angela Bassett, Robin Tunney, Lou Diamond Phillips.

Allen Smithee's epic outer space adventure. Page 32.

HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER:

Jan 18

Buena Vista Home Video. With: Michael Parks, Rebecca Gayheart, Ara Cell.

The prequel to FROM DUSK TILL DAWN, filmed in the idiom of the spaghetti western. Page 52.

LOST SOULS

Jan 28

New Line Cinema. With: Winona Ryder, Ben Chaplin, John Hurt.

The directing debut of cinematographer Janusz Kaminsky, THE EXORCIST for Y2K. Page 30.

SCREAM 3

Feb 4

Dimension-Miramax. With: David Arquette, Neve Campbell, Courtney Cox.

Wes Craven directs the final chapter of the self-referential slasher series. Page 12

PITCH BLACK

Feb 17

USA Films. With: Vin Diesel, Cole Hauser.

David Twohy (THE ARRIVAL) directs an interstellar monster movie. Page 6.

CROW 3: SALVATION

Mar 3

Dimension. With: Eric Mabius, Kirsten Dunst, William Atherton, Jodi Lyn O'Keefe.

Rekindling the horror franchise based on the graphic novel by James O'Barr. Page 28.

THE NINTH GATE

Mar 31

Artisan. With: Johnny Depp, Frank Langella, Lena Olin, Emanuelle Seigner.

Roman Polanski directs a supernatural thriller about a book that can summon the ultimate dark powers, based on "The Dumas Club" by Arturo Perez Revverte.

Fantasia 2000

By Mike Lyons

Disney opens their newly revamped FANTASIA 2000 at selected IMAX theatres nationwide on January 1, 2000. Some of the most famous vignettes from the original have been deleted to make way for the seven new segments. "The most difficult for me was to lose the whole 'Night on Bald Mountain scene,'" admitted Roy E. Disney, Walt's nephew who heads the studio's animation department. "It's just such a classic piece of animation. To see that go was tough. But, the only way that you could use that piece was at the end. We tried it once, actually, in the middle, without Ave Maria. It doesn't work. Anyone who has seen the movie would have just felt cheated. It's interesting, because the film has changed. I've gone forever saying that nothing has changed. But the cutting and the pacing of what we do today is just so much faster."

The directors of each of the new segments in FANTASIA 2000 faced their own sets of artistic challenges. Francis Glebas, who helmed the "Pomp and Circumstance" segment, which is being used as a vehicle for Disney's most famously foul-tempered fowl, Donald Duck, hit a brick wall that can only be called surrealistically Disney.

"In one scene, [Donald] is sunbathing in a hammock with this tropical drink," said Glebas. "He jumps out of the hammock and he isn't wearing a shirt. Daisy comes over and gives him a shirt to wear. So, a big question came up, 'Is Donald naked?' It was a big contention, 'Can we have a naked Duck?' What's funny is, it was considered okay once he puts on his shirt and yet his bottom is still exposed!"

It may sound like nothing more than fodder for a late night talk show monologue, but "Pomp and Circumstance" is indeed a big deal for both Donald and Disney. After all, it was "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" segment in the 1940 original (also featured in

Disney revamps their classic with new segments in IMAX.



Joining Mickey's Sorcerer's Apprentice is Donald Duck (l) in a new segment "Pomp and Circumstance," opening January 1.

the sequel) that served as a comeback vehicle for Mickey Mouse, when the character's popularity began to wane.

This new companion piece to "Sorcerer's Apprentice" uses the familiar, graduation day strains of "Pomp and Circumstance," as it tells the story of Noah's assistant, Donald Duck, who is trying desperately to get two of each animal on to the ark. There's just one that he can't find—Daisy Duck. In a nod to SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE, the two characters spend the majority of the musical segment just missing each other.

"The whole thing being done in pantomime really lent itself to Donald," said Glebas. "It was actually like doing a silent film, only it was much trickier, because if we made a little change, the music didn't change, so you had to come up with new 'bits of business' to stick in where the old 'business' was."

Glebas also added, "What's really interesting is that it really 'reads' as Donald

Duck even though there's no dialogue. That was a real trick. We began to realize that the more you 'smash' Donald and make things go wrong for him, that it was funny. Then, at one point, I realized, 'Wait a minute, we have to make sure that he really deserves it.'

"The thing about Donald is that he's that piece of us that tries, against our better will, to do something that he shouldn't be doing and that's why he deserves to be 'smashed.' That's what was funny. So, there was this really fine line. We had to make sure that it was woven in."

Glebas also remembered that, originally, the segment had a larger scope. "Michael [Eisner's] original idea was to use 'Pomp and Circumstance' with Donald, Mickey and Goofy in a high school gymnasium, graduating. That's how it started, with the characters getting diplomas. It then grew to the point that every single Disney character was going to be in it. That got complicated, because then the realization came—'Who was going to animate all of this?' It would have been a real challenge."

Glebas, who had been working on other segments of FANTASIA 2000, presented an idea for one of them, to be themed around the story of Noah's Ark. When he heard that the studio was searching for one of the new segments to spotlight Donald, he quickly modified his idea. "I did this poster of Donald, putting his hand out, waiting for a raindrop to fall," noted Glebas. "It read: 'It's Donald's Last Round-Up.' That became the title, which was later changed to 'Noah's Duck.'"

Glebas can't believe that he's been involved, not only with one of the studio's most eagerly awaited films, but with Disney's most famous, pants-less, Duck. More importantly, he can't believe that FANTASIA 2000's long road is now coming to an end, as he noted, with a laugh, "I started working on the film in '92. That was the year my son was born and when it comes out in theaters, he'll be able to read my name in the credits!" □

PITCH BLACK

By Joe Fordham

"We were looking for a story that was about fear of the dark," producer Tom Engelman recalled, speaking from his office at Warner Roadshow Studios on Australia's Gold Coast where he filmed *PITCH BLACK*, a new science fiction thriller from Polygram, scheduled for release in the first quarter of 2000 from USA Films.

Written and directed by David Twohy (*THE ARRIVAL*), from a screenplay originated by Ken and Jim Wheat, *PITCH BLACK* began shooting August 19, 1998, after two years in development at Interscope Communications. Engelman brought in Twohy after their past association on the thriller *TERMINAL VELOCITY*. Coober Peedy, South Australia (Mad Max's stomping ground), was chosen to represent the main location, an arid planet blasted by three suns which set once in every 60 years. The story begins when a passenger spaceship crash-lands on the planet. The survivors find giant alien bones, weird petrified vegetation, an abandoned settlement and no life—until darkness falls.

"It's first and foremost a scary movie," Engelman emphasized. "The fact that it is set on an alien planet and takes place in the future is important but not the fundamental reason for us making this movie. It's a movie about a group of people thrown together who must struggle to survive the most dangerous, most frightening night imaginable."

The survivors are comprised of an ensemble cast of largely unknown actors lead by Radha Mitchell (*HIGH ART*) as the sole surviving spaceship pilot, Cole Hauser (*GOOD WILL HUNTING*) as a hard-boiled cop, and Vin Diesel (*SAVING*

Screenwriter David Twohy directs his horror/sci-fi hybrid.



Twohy (l), writer and director of *THE ARRIVAL*, rehearses stranded space travelers Cole Hauser and Radha Mitchell during filming in Australia

PRIVATE RYAN) as Hauser's convict charge, a murderer with eyes enhanced to see in the dark. Engelman compared the casting to the first *ALIEN* in that their aim was to create "a character thriller at the core of this scary visual effects movie."

Another referent, though more obscure, was the 1953 Henri Clouzot film *WAGES OF FEAR*, wherein four greasy down-and-outs cross a harsh and barren landscape ferrying a cargo of nitroglycerine which could blow at any minute. The explosives in *PITCH BLACK* are of the carnivorous alien variety, furnished by a team of digital and creature effects artists under the design aegis of Patrick Tatopoulos.

From December 1997 through September 1998, the creature design period had been an unusually long but rewarding process for Tatopoulos. "I got involved when I was actually still on *GODZILLA* when I met David Twohy for the first time. I got excited about the concept right away and produced two renderings of the basic creatures. I showed these to David and every time we talked I would go away and redesign and push it and push it, until he brought from me the ideal concept of ultimately designing something that surprises me as well. This time I've got something that goes beyond what I think I could have done on just my own."

All creature imagery has been labeled classified at this stage to preserve the mystery lurking in the dark, part of the challenge of creating "a pitch black movie." Suffice it to say 95% of the creature chores have been assigned to CGI, supervised by Peter Chiang (*THE BORROWERS*), with the remainder of the mechanical effects fabricated by local Australian creature maker John Cox from the Tatopoulos designs.

Engelman elaborated, "As the nocturnal world blooms to life, I think everyone will have a sense of the immensity of the challenge that these people are up against to survive. But you aren't going to be seeing a thousand bugs during daylight. It's all what you don't see, isn't it?"

Another point of reference to Ridley Scott's *ALIEN* perhaps? The 1979 classic also came up in conversation with Tatopoulos as an inspiration for himself and his director Twohy. "*ALIEN* is the perfect film where you can't tell the size of the creature, or even its shape. You saw aspects of the creature that looked like something else. I think we have that with *PITCH BLACK*, but it's a fine line to confuse the eye and still retain design integrity when you reveal the full creature. Without getting into detail, I believe we've created something that is not a monster, that feels like a natural living thing." Having said that, Tatopoulos was certain his creation would not elicit our sympathy. "No, it'll just look cool," he laughed. "These are evil little things that you just can't stop. You want to see them dead."

Even after all this careful preparation, at the time of writing in the final month of shooting, both Engelman and Tatopoulos indicated elements of creature design were very much in-process. Engelman commented, "We're finding the best



Vin Diesel as an interstellar escaped convict with eyes enhanced to see in the dark, on an arid planet with three suns that set only once every 60 years.

antagonist for our characters, if I can put it in that way, in terms of how our characters meet their demise. Some of these things are effecting design." A true example of the effects of digital filmmaking, where performance is adjusted in post-production. Tatopoulos concurred, "This project has been a design job," his studio manufacturing the nemesis, deciding in post-production "the way it acts, the way its musculature and the pattern of its body-changes in motion." According to Tatopoulos, the results have been more than up to scratch. "It has become almost like a friendship now because I consider my job done. If there's anything else to be done I do it because I want to do it. When I create a creature effect, I think I might as well finish every detail, it just makes me feel better. [He laughed.] It's my baby."

Shooting, however, was not without its problems, courtesy of the Australian winter. Engelman recalled the whole location shoot

seemed cursed. "We worked on sacred Aboriginal ground. Now we had a very respectful, reciprocal relationship with the Aboriginal community, but it did seem that there were a series of inexplicable weather conditions. The satellite picture for the next morning would read absolutely clear, we'd go out and it would be storming and raining and lightning, then we'd have the weather forecast sent to us again and it would be absolutely clear. We had 80 mph

"It's a fine line to confuse the eye and still retain design integrity," said creature designer Patrick Tatopoulos. "We've created a monster that feels like a natural thing."

winds where Mother Nature herself seemed to be turning upon us. Kind of an interesting mood for a scary movie."

Conditions for the cast were miserable. "It rained almost every day. It was almost snow condition temperatures. What's funny about it was we had people running about in stripped-down clothing with gel all spritzed with water, having to look like they were cooking in the sun and they were freezing in the cold and in the rain."

A headache indeed for director of photography David Eggby. Veteran of VIRUS and MAD MAX, Eggby proposed a solution to the weather problem which proved to be a unique and cost-saving method for generating alien skies. Engelman recalled, "We used a process called bleach bypass, which we kind of stumbled on when we were testing night photography to find the richest blacks. The way bleach bypass works is you skip the bleach bath when developing the film, leaving more silver in the negative, redistributing colors and bringing out the contrast. The end result was it gives us these really trippy daytime skies. But it's a risky process. You're effecting the negative, which we tend not to do in America because there's no going back.

David Eggby really mastered this technique and we're really pleased with the results."

Ultimately, Engelman and Tatopoulos defer to David Twohy as their main source of inspiration and energy throughout the project. For Tatopoulos it was a rare meeting of minds, "David more than understands effects. He's an extremely clever man. Truly. I don't say that about everybody I work with, but David is fantastic. He will search until he finds what he wants. I think it was a new experience for me in that sense. My limits moved further. I'm a commercial artist, we all have our signature, if people come to you, you expect they're coming to you because something that you've done before, but ultimately there is also a human side to this relationship. We sat down together for hours and we really had a great time. It was fantastic. We understood each other. It took a long time, but we were always moving in a direction we felt more comfortable with. It was truly a great experience."

Engelman concluded, "David Twohy wrote a script that would stand on its own without any visual effects. His approach is not to depend upon visual effects and spectacle to tell his story. The story, the characters, the development, the issues of fear and anxiety and tension, all those things that go into the craft of story-telling are there, and the story stands by itself. The movie is charged with this ticking bomb as the lights our characters are carrying flicker out one by one. It allows for tremendous character conflict. It allows for great tension. You never know until you actually shoot a story if that's going to come to be, but I think he's got a really exciting thriller." □

Hauser's interstellar cargo ship, filming the 1:36 scale model at L.A.'s Hunter Gratzner Industries. USA Films opens the Polygram production nationwide in early 2000.



Galaxy Quest

Tim Allen and Sigourney Weaver star in a wicked parody of STAR TREK.

By Mitch Persons

GALAXY QUEST, which opened December 10, is a parody of classic STAR TREK-like TV performers Jason Nesmith, played by William Shatner look-alike Tim Allen and Gwen DeMarco (Sigourney Weaver). In the seventies, they were among the stars of the outer-space series of the title which ran for four seasons, was abruptly cancelled, and was almost immediately forgotten.

Now, 20 years later, the once-popular stars of the show have been forced to make token appearances at science fiction conventions, mostly for the sake of a handful of loyal fans, and for the few meager dollars the conventions bring in. While the "Questarians" have been going from convention to convention, a group of aliens from the planet Theramin have been monitoring syndicated reruns of GALAXY QUEST. The Thermians are convinced the broadcasts are not fiction, but real historical documents. The aliens visit one of the conventions and whisk Nesmith, DeMarco, et al, away to their solar system to—need it be said?—save it from destruction.

Without the novelty of the TREK parody it sounds like THE LAST STARFIGHTER, MOM AND DAD SAVE THE WORLD or CAPTAIN ZOOM. "There is a new angle here, though," noted actor Jed Rees, who plays Teb, a Thermian, "that does set GALAXY QUEST apart from other sci-fi films with the same theme. The angle is:



The Questarians, Sigourney Weaver as Gwen DeMarco, Alan Rickman as Sir Alexander Dane, Tim Allen as Shatner look-alike Jason Nesmith, and Tony Shalhoub.

how can these aliens, who are so scientifically advanced, be so naive as to believe that a fictional show is actually the real thing?" It was an important question for Rees, who plays a member of the race that kidnaps the TV has-beens.

"I puzzled about that question for some time, but then I saw that the answer pretty much adhered to the basic belief that [evolution can] go in different directions. Our Earth developed television, whereas another civilization, like the Thermians, may have had different choices to make as a civilization. They may not have even thought of television, and they hadn't evolved to the point where they knew what falsehoods or deceptions, or pretenses were. It was almost as if the Thermians may have had their version of Adam and Eve, but Eve never took a bite of the ap-

ple."

Rees, whose alien makeup is unmistakably homo-sapiens-looking, certainly gives the impression that Teb could have evolved from Adam and Eve-like antecedents. "Oh, no," Rees laughed, "this is just a disguise that the Thermians assume. Actually, in their natural form they resemble gigantic squids. The creatures have these appearance generators that they carry in their belts, and they flick them on to look human so they can interact with Nesmith and the rest of his human cast."

The appearance generators do cause some problems. Although most of the aliens that the Galaxy Force encounter are benign, there is the evil element that they are forced to confront. Noted Tim Allen, "Sarris is the villain of this piece, and he is not messing around. He's pretty

violent when he finally meets up with Nesmith, and Nesmith gets the crap beaten out of him. In the scene I just finished doing today, Sarris has shapeshifted so that he looks like crewmember Fred Kwan. I get the chance to beat the crap out of him this time, though.

"But I think I went a little too far. In the fight, I hit Tony [Shalhoub] pretty hard in the head, for real. Dean [Parisot, the director] shouted, 'Get that actor out of there!' Not Tim, not Allen, but 'that actor.' So they put the stunt man in. He managed to get through the scene without giving anybody a concussion."

Alien abductions, slimy monsters, fistfights. GALAXY QUEST doesn't sound much like a comedy. "It does start out dramatically enough," said a blonde-wigged Sigourney Weaver, "what with these struggling, out-of-work actors trying to re-establish themselves in a business that has pretty much forgotten about them. That part is very touching. But when you consider the outrageous characters that are involved in this story, like Jason, Tim's character, who is a hard-drinking blowhard and a bully, and Gwen, the woman I play, a big, buxom over-the-hill blonde starlet—sort of a latter-day Norma Desmond—then the humor creeps in, and you can just sit back and laugh at the antics. There is even a conventioneer, played by Sam Rockwell, who comes along with the Questarians on their odyssey, and he is terrified the whole time. He's a longtime fan of sci-fi shows,



Allen and Weaver on the bridge of the NSEA Protector, built by aliens from TV images of their cancelled series, production design by Linda DeScenna.

and he keeps insisting that the 'unnamed crew member' is going to be the first one to die. There's one scene where he goes, 'My name is Fleegman. It's Fleegman,' as if that will protect him."

Alan Rickman, the London-born actor who plays Sir Alexander Dane and his half-human, half-reptile TV alter ego, and who is known primarily for serious roles in such films as *DIE HARD* (1988,) and *MICHAEL COLLINS* (1996) has a very pragmatic view about comedy. "Acting is probably the only profession where we have a sense of humor about ourselves. In *GALAXY QUEST*, I play a dignified Shakespearean actor who has made a name for himself playing a fellow who is part snake. I walk around all the time wearing this reptilian headpiece that gets more and more disheveled as time goes on. It doesn't affect Dane in the slightest; even with the moldering makeup, he never loses his dignity. If that isn't laughing at yourself, I don't know what is."

The self-effacing humor seems to carry over onto set design. Built under the supervision of production designer Linda DeScenna, the back-

grounds have an almost cheesy look to them, wonderfully evocative of the look of the original *STAR TREK*.

"That's especially true with the inside of NSEA Protector," said DeScenna. "The Thermians have built this ship with which to transport the Questarians to their planet. Since the only design the Thermians know is one they've seen on the TV broadcasts, they reproduce it as best they can, and the set

wasn't that spectacular to begin with."

The interior of the NSEA Protector was originally supposed to have been more elaborate and realistic-looking than it eventually turned out. Harold Ramis was initially tapped as the director of *GALAXY QUEST* and in November, 1998, DeScenna flew out to Chicago to confer with him. "Harold and his associates' conception of the ship was they

wanted the bridge to be like it was executed by a very expensive production designer who had a lot of money," said DeScenna. "Then, I guess, Harold decided that his type of direction wasn't right for the project, so we started working with Dean. Dean's idea of design was a little more economical, a little more self-mocking. We were able to make things look cheap enough, but I would have liked to have made them look even cheaper.

"Harold had his own ideas about what he wanted the picture to look like. The way the script was initially written, it took place not in the present day, but in some unspecified period, probably the late sixties. Harold insisted that everything, the sets, the costumes, be depicted as purposely dark and vague. When Dean came on board, he switched the time period to the late seventies, the early eighties, and then finally, the beginning of the millennium. Now the sets are more modern, more brightly lit, and are a little more technical, perhaps.

"We also added detail. There is one scene which takes place in an outer-space hospitality room, like a place you might

Alan Rickman as Dr. Lazarus in "Today Is the Tomorrow of Our Yesterdays," capturing the production design and lighting of the classic *STAR TREK* to a 'T.'





Allen as Taggart and Rickman as Dane in "The Bivrakium Element," aiming their phaser on laughs in a parody of the Kirk and Spock Trek relationship.

find at an airport. As the rooms were first conceived, the walls were decorated in an uninteresting and flat way. We decided that we wanted the place to represent different planets and galaxies, so we created these realistic-looking, though nebulous, symbols which were placed all around the room.

"Also sort of bland were the uniforms that the Galaxy Quest people wore. I remember seeing a design in a book of a little round symbol with a satellite and stars circling around it. I took that design and adapted it as the GALAXY QUEST symbol on the uniforms. It's on all the sleeves, and also can be seen in the bridge section of the GALAXY QUEST spaceship, the NSEA Protector.

"There was one area that I originally thought of that I was kind of disappointed wasn't fully developed. Under Harold's direction, every interior was going to be really small and tight and windowless. GALAXY QUEST is based on the idea that everything from a TV series is taken to be real, and when you do a TV series, you don't have a lot of money, and so you build something that is 17 by 17, instead of 50 by 50. Dean said that it would be very hard to shoot anything that cramped and tight. I really liked that initial idea, but then we got away from that, and things got a little bigger.

"Dean did manage to change more than sets and design. When Harold was on the film, it was a different script. It wasn't as much of a sci-fi adven-

ture/comedy as it is now. Of course, in fairness to Harold, when he was working on this picture, nobody had been cast, and the era in which the events took place hadn't really been settled on. Dean had a much more solid script to work with, and by the time he started, Sigourney Weaver, Tim Allen, and the others had already been signed.

"One thing that I was aware of, and that I did mention, even to Harold, is something that all TV shows do, which we kind of did, but not as much as I would have wanted, and that was reuse set pieces so we actually recognized them: the furniture, the walls, because that's what they actually did in TV. We didn't get a chance to do that because of time. I wanted to reuse props, to have specific props that we actually saw in Jason Nesmith's house, like he had taken them home. I wanted to have this motif of recognition going.

"One of the reasons I wanted

Jed Rees as Teb, a Thermian from the Klatu Nebula, leading a delegation to recruit the TV has-beens into a real space war, with no idea what an "actor" is.



DESIGNER LINDA DESCENNA

"One of the reasons I wanted to do this film was we could let things be kind of tacky. It helps with laughs if you can look at a set and say, 'Hey, that doesn't look like a real spaceship.'"

to do this film is because everything didn't have to be real high-tech, and vacu-formed, and we could let things be, kind of, well, tacky. And so it just evolved that way. Besides, it helps with the laughs if somebody can look at a set, and say, 'Hey, that doesn't look like a real spaceship.'"

Quite true, but realism can also heighten comedy. Bill George, the superbly creative co-visual effects supervisor on STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE tackled a similar job here on GALAXY QUEST. In his office at Warner Hollywood Studios in Los Angeles, it is astounding how many GALAXY QUEST illustrations adorn the walls and desk. George is almost lost among them.

"I do think," George says, "that the comedy is strengthened by the fact that the effects we have created look real. They don't look cartoony or phony. And that is something we all struggled with at the outset: do we make these monsters and machines hokey or horrendous? GALAXY QUEST is a comedy, a lampoon, perhaps, yet it is a *science fiction* lampoon. It's different from a lot of the STAR TREK and STAR WARS films that I've worked on, where things are presented as

fantasy, but serious fantasy. Here, everything is supposed to be funny, but the humor derives from plausible people reacting to implausible situations and characters. Cheap, unconvincing monsters and gadgets just don't fill the bill."

George pointed to a picture of what appeared to be an inverted test-tube sitting atop a petri dish. "Here's an example. This is a transport pod. The Thermians have their own technology that they use, and they use it to get Jason Nesmith to them, and basically it is a disk that Jason stands on, and he gets covered with goo that protects him, and then it rockets him through space. And one of the great things is, up until this happens, Jason has no idea what's going on. He drinks a little too much, and he's slightly hung over, so he thinks that this whole contraption has been built by some kids in their garage, but then when he's transported to the spaceship, and these doors open and reveal everything to him, it dawns on him that it's all real.

"Stan Winston, who is doing most of the creature designs on this film, has come up with some pretty wild ideas of his own, [including] a gigantic octopus-like thing about to devour a spacecraft. There is a sequence when Tommy Webber, who played the navigator on the original GALAXY QUEST series, has to become a real-life pilot, so he watches a rerun of the show, an episode where the Questarians have to outrun this huge mollusk. From watching the broadcast, Tommy learns to be a top gun pilot.

"That mollusk is pretty authentic-looking, but every once in a while, we revert to trying to make something look tacky, especially if it was a creature that was supposed to

GalaxyQuest

QUEEN OF OUTER SPACE

Sigourney Weaver pokes fun at Ripley.

appear on the series. We created [one] space creature that looks like it's made out of rubber. You can see cracks and chips, it looks real hokey. The peculiar thing is that the creature is actually CGI. It might have made more sense to just build this thing out of real rubber, but it was cheaper to go CG, and we do get more control when we do it in the computer. If we build something and shoot it on stage, we do it once, and then if Dean, our director, doesn't like it, well, we're kind of stuck. On the computer we can try it, and we go 'What do you think?' 'Make him move faster,' or whatever."

George held up a picture of a revolting-looking insect. "This is the blood tick, and he is one of my favorites. There's a sequence where after the Thermians have gotten the cast on board, they make a dinner for all of them, and for Jason they make steak, for Gwen they make this French food, everybody has their own food. Well, Sir Alexander, because he's supposed to be an alien, they have this hideous bowl filled with live leeches—like our friend, here. It's really great to see the expression on Alan [Rickman]'s face when he picks this thing up on his spoon.

"Alan's expression perhaps sums up the whole underlying theme of GALAXY QUEST. We have a situation that is totally far out, yet within the boundaries of the story, we want the tension to be real, the drama to be real, and we want the comedy to be real. Alan's face tells us, yes, this is horrid, and this is actually happening, but this is also extremely funny."

Noted Daryl Mitchell (10 THINGS I HATE ABOUT YOU, VERONICA'S CLOSET) the outgoing young actor who portrays Tommy Webber. "There are a lot of laughs in this movie. But there were even more laughs behind the scenes, and most of them came from Tim Allen. We all know Tim is a fine comic actor, but he never seems to forget that he is first and foremost a comedian. And he will play to anyone who is within earshot. That person was usually me this time. Not that I minded. The guy is hilarious!" □

"You may be wondering why, after playing Ripley in the ALIEN films, that I would want to do another sci-fi project," said Sigourney Weaver on the set of GALAXY QUEST. "It was not an easy decision. And I guess it was an odd decision, because I immediately saw Gwen—Tawny—who is not really described, as this big, overblown, sort of statuesque blonde. Initially, I thought it was probably a bad idea to do this. But I was drawn to it. I love Tim Allen, I love Alan Rickman, and I loved the script, and I thought, I don't know if it's appropriate for me to play this part, but I'm really drawn to Gwen, because I've never played anyone like her. I see her as an extension of every frustrated starlet who ever existed.

"I got ALIEN, Gwen got GALAXY QUEST. I can just picture Gwen's manager saying, 'Look, this is a series. This is going to put you on the map. It's going to make you a star.' So that was her crossroads. She did the series, and it was great for what it was, but she was totally this sex object in it, an image she didn't want.

"GALAXY QUEST is about these unbelievable losers, with no sense of self-worth, that get put into this situation that they have absolutely no idea how to handle, yet there are these creatures who think that they're gods. From this irony comes most of the humor of the picture. If I understand Dean's [Parisot, the director] and our writers David Howard and Robert Gordon's vision correctly, it is also almost like a WIZARD OF OZ sort of thing, where each of us get what we need from this ex-



After playing Ripley in three ALIEN movies, Weaver tackles comedy as washed-up Gwen DeMarco, trying TV action moves for real.

perience, and we come out fulfilled."

Weaver has been adept at comedy before, most notably in GHOSTBUSTERS I and II and WORKING GIRL. "But this is the first time I've taken my Ripley persona and transferred it into a comedy, although I think that the prim and proper costume I wear in GALAXY QUEST has killed the memory of Ripley forever. And it is very, very different playing a sci-fi comedy, with the long waits, and everything. On these long set-ups, it's not like the other comedies I've done, where you play the scenes in pretty quick succession. Here, you have these two-hour breaks where you're waiting for the green screen, and this and that. It is a challenge, I must say, to keep the lightness when there are so many breaks in concentration.

"Dean manages to make

these characters slowly evolve, rather than having them board the spaceship and immediately become heroes. I'm glad for that slow transition, because when the film begins, these people are probably the least likely heroes in the world. I have many scenes where I am put to a test, and it's just like watching a car accident; I'm waiting to be found out, but for some reason or another I always sort of squeak through, but it's terrifying. Then, when everybody is together, we can be ourselves. Most of us are trying to escape from this lunacy we've gotten ourselves into.

"I see GALAXY QUEST as being a very relevant story. We have this villain, Sarris, a creature who looks like a giant squid, and he is incredibly cold-hearted and cruel. He is really a sadist. With Sarris, it is genocide against the good Thermians. That whole invasion of Kosovo, and all the violence that is going on now, innocent people being gunned down, it has a lot of resonance with this film. What Sarris is doing to these people is just what you read about in the news: get rid of them, wipe them out, for no other reason than they're there."

Weaver noted she has fond memories of her ALIEN big break. "I was astounded by my good fortune. I was working with Ridley Scott, a director I admired. I used to wander around those magnificent ALIEN sets, and I used to think, 'This is so cool. They built this just for us. We don't have to pretend anything,' not realizing for a second that of course it was for the movie."

Mitch Persons

WES CRAVEN SCREAM 3

Director Wes Craven on making the third time the charm, sans Kevin Williamson.

By Lawrence French

The agony of my soul found vent in one loud, long and final Scream.

Edgar Allan Poe

SCREAM 3, the final episode in Dimension films highly regarded horror trilogy, will debut in theaters on February 4, with all of the surviving cast and behind-the-scenes talent returning, with one surprising exception: the man who started the franchise, screenwriter Kevin Williamson. "Kevin had too much work on his plate," explained director Wes Craven, "and it was just not feasible for him to write SCREAM 3. Kevin actually did a treatment but we didn't use it. Kevin's story was set in Woodsboro again, and set much more among high school students. We wanted to be in a later stage of Sydney's [Neve Campbell] life, since she had already been to college, and we went in a totally different direction.

"Bob Weinstein [President of Dimension Films] brought in a new writer, Ehren Kruger [no relation to Freddy], who was someone I didn't know, but came from Bob's stable of young geniuses. Bob had worked with Ehren on John Frankenheimer's REINDEER GAMES, and also on TEXAS RANGERS. Bob said, 'Let Ehren take a shot at a treatment and see what you think. He can probably do it over the week-



Craven directs David Arquette as Deputy Dewey in SCREAM 3, which reunites the entire cast to end the horror franchise, with a script by Ehren Kruger.

end.' Well, quite frankly, I thought Bob was crazy, because it was going to be a complete page one re-thinking of everything—nothing was going to be used from Kevin's original treatment. So in four days Ehren came through with a complete outline of a really fabulous movie. After that, he came through with a script in a remarkably short time, and we were very happy with what we got from him. He's really like the next Kevin Williamson."

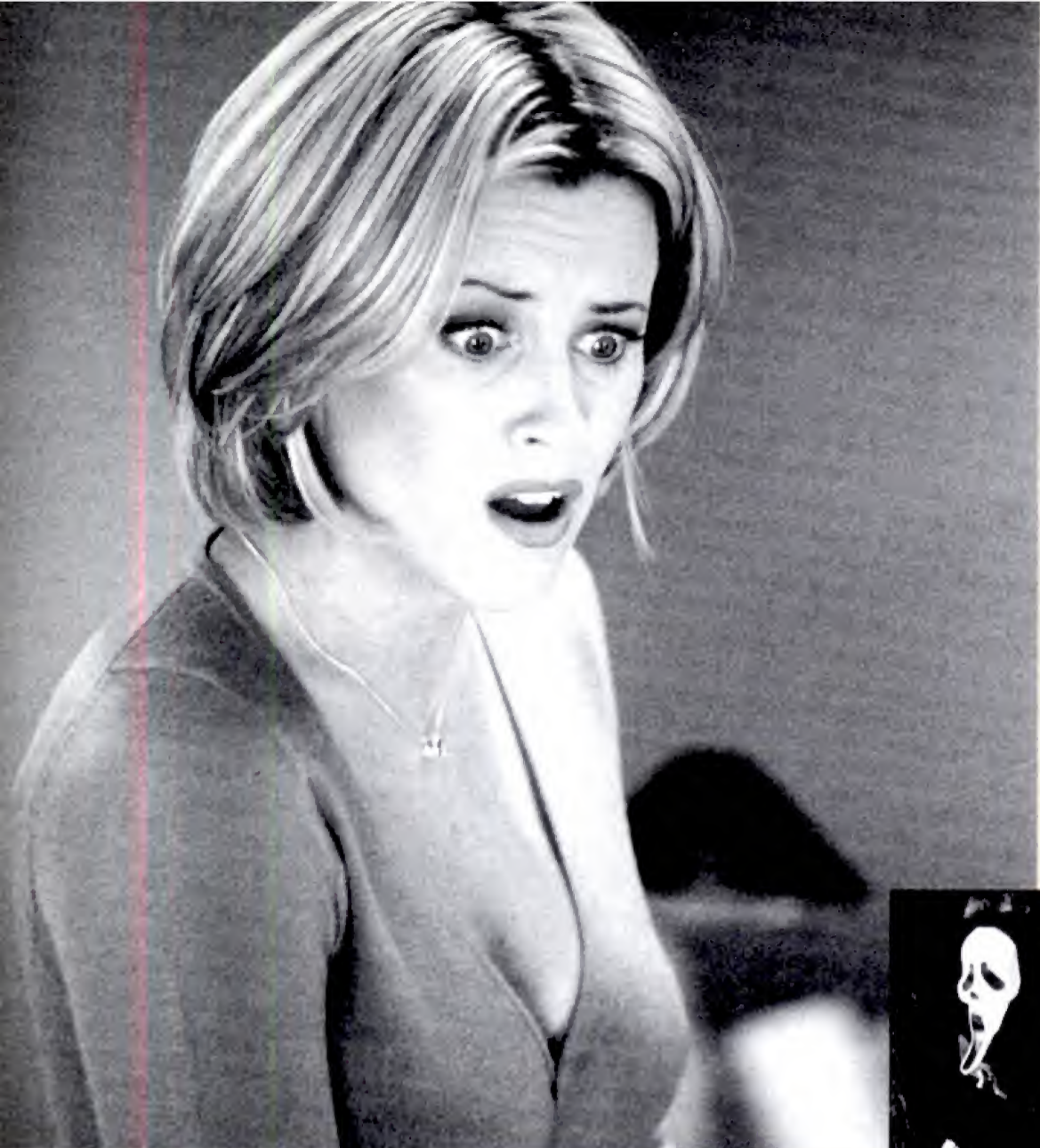
Williamson, who recently made his directing debut with the poorly received TEACHING MRS. TINGLE, faced a dilemma regarding SCREAM 3, because he clearly wanted to write the script. "SCREAM is my baby," remarked Williamson, "but I was in the

middle of postproduction on KILLING MRS. TINGLE as well as shooting WASTELAND and the script for SCREAM 3 was due. I only had two weeks to write it, and I just wasn't capable of doing it. Everyone was frustrated with me, and it was a big sore spot. I got so overloaded that I called Bob Weinstein and said, 'I just can't do it. Can we push this movie to next year?' I gave all the reasons I felt it should be pushed—because of all the violent stuff going on in the world and so-on, but they had already locked in Courteney [Cox] and Neve [Campbell], and it was impossible to push it into production in July and it was initially scheduled for a December, 1999 opening.

"We all very much wanted to make it this year," explained

Craven, "so it all would be done in the 20th century, so to speak. We all had other obligations coming down the pike and that meant we had to go while we were all heavily committed in other areas. It was very difficult, because both Neve and Courteney were back in their TV series, so we're shooting in the so-called leisure time from their TV shows. We've been working on weekends, and so-forth, but it's not that different from the way the other two SCREAM movies were made. They've always been worked around Courteney and Neve's schedules, and their TV shows have been very cooperative."

Ehren Kruger's new storyline opens with a murder on top of the famous Hollywood sign and then proceeds to follow Sydney Prescott, who is now pursuing an acting career in Tinseltown. Meanwhile, TV reporter Gail Weathers is hosting her own talk show, and a Hollywood studio has begun filming STAB 3: RETURN TO WOODSBORO, based on the past events in Sydney's life. "One of the central events that occurs in SCREAM 3," related Craven, "is the making of STAB 3, so we have a movie within a movie. And even though Sydney is not a part of the actual production of STAB 3, she gets drawn into its world and is exposed to the false image of her own life and tragedies. She finds herself walking on the set and seeing



Jenny McCarthy is featured in *SCREAM 3* as a new cast of guest stars join the regulars to face the masked killer (inset).



her house, but of course it's not really her house—it's what people are making of it. There's a lot of that kind of thing, the examination of reality versus the illusion presented by films and the media."

Gail Weathers and Deputy Dewey (David Arquette), also take on a larger role in *SCREAM 3*, when they become the chief investigators of the murders which start reoccurring during the production of *STAB 3*. "Courtney and David are certainly the lead couple in the movie," explained Craven, "but Neve is so strong, she's still the focus. It's kind of a dually shared starship, but the story all revolves around Neve and revelations about her past. It's a summation and final revelation of her life and history, so she's very much the star, but at the same time, Courtney and David do have a tremendous number of scenes together and they are kind of the narrators of the story, since they are doing most of the investigation."

Setting the movie in the filmmaking capitol gave Craven a chance to explore some of his pet peeves. "I think we've all put in some inside jokes about studio executives and that type of thing," noted Craven, "but I

think we've also been harder on ourselves, than somebody from the outside might have been. Poking fun at crassness or greed or some of the darker sides of the whole business. It's also fun to go in and out of sets that are identical to places you've seen in the first *SCREAM*, and then suddenly find yourself off the set and on a soundstage. It's that jarring realization that not everything that appears to be real, is really real. That's one of the fun themes of this movie. We also shot all over Hollywood; right on Hollywood Boulevard, and at the Hollywood sign, so the whole L.A. scene is part of the fabric of the picture."

Shooting a movie about the making of a movie would seem to invite a slew of cameo appearances, such as Robert Altman did so effectively in *THE PLAYER*, but apparently cameo roles were kept to a minimum. "We have a cameo from Roger Corman and Carrie Fisher," said Craven, "as well as one from Jay and Silent Bob [Kevin Smith] from *CLERKS*, but that's about it. The crew keeps telling me I have to get into one of these shots, but I haven't done that yet. There's also characters who could be compared

to Kevin or myself, who are making *STAB 3*, but that's only because the story revolves around the making of a genre film. We haven't gone quite as far as *A NEW NIGHTMARE*, where I appeared as myself in the movie. Directing this is a big enough part, believe me."

When Ehren Kruger completed his first draft script, Craven worked with the writer on fine-tuning it for about a month. "There was a great amount of input," noted Craven, "which was why Ehren was working out of our production offices. We were trading pages back and forth and having meetings with him and our producers, Marianne Maddalena and Cathy Konrad. We all had ideas and we also had conference calls with Neve, Courtney and David. They would all have suggestions, so there was a lot of collaboration, as there should be, because the actors know more about their characters than almost anybody."

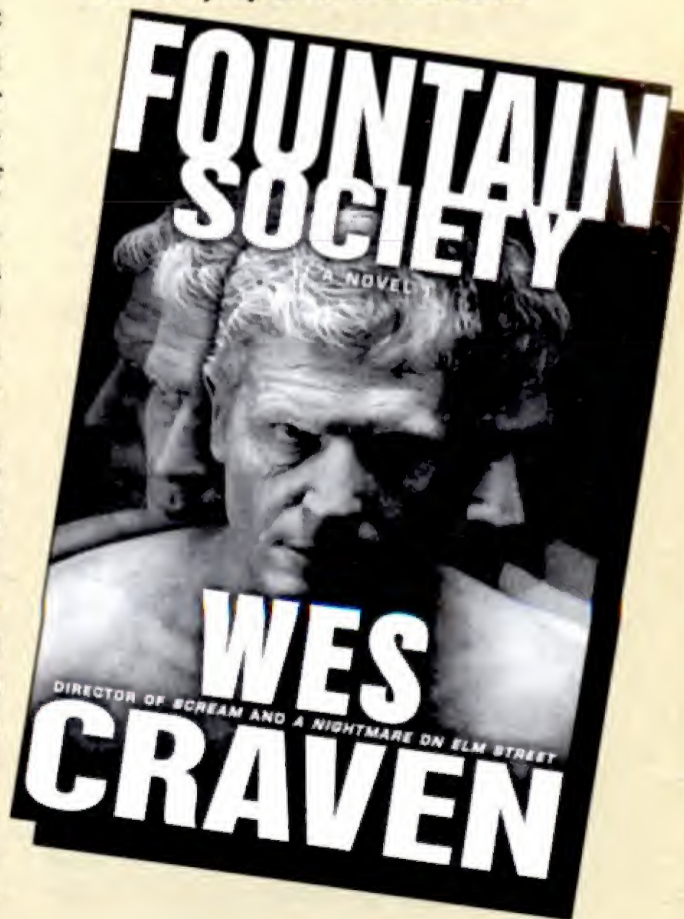
With original creator Kevin Williamson out of the picture, and a new writer on board, it was up to Craven to make sure the events depicted in *SCREAM 3* matched the earlier films, as well as not let the story become a mere re-hashing of events from the first two films. "We always looked at this as a trilogy," asserted Craven, "so we're not doing the typical type of genre sequel, where they usually bring back the villain, whether it's Freddy, Jason or Candyman, and then troupe out a whole new cast of victims. With a trilogy, you keep the same central core of positive characters, and then you can have a generational thing like in *THE GODFATHER*, but it's basically the same people, or the same family. So what we're doing is showing people mature

"We always looked at this as a trilogy," asserted Craven, "so we are not doing the typical sequel. Also there's a consensus that there won't be a *SCREAM 4*."

and grow, from the brashness of their youth, into the maturity of their adulthood. It's basically set around the central character of Sydney Prescott, along with Gail Weathers and Dewey. So we're seeing somebody from the side of law and order, somebody from the side of the media, and somebody from the side of the ordinary citizen, starting as a high school student, then as a college student and now as a young adult. That makes it very different from the sort of generic characters that get loaded into most sequels. We feel that we are in a very different category, of, not a sequel, but the final part of a trilogy. Also from everyone there is a consensus that there is not going to be a *SCREAM 4*. When people see this one, they'll be seeing the last *SCREAM*."

Of course if *SCREAM 3* is a huge success, it seems highly probable that Dimension would want to continue with the franchise ad infinitum, but Craven insists that will be unlikely. "I certainly won't do another one," exclaimed Craven, "nor will

Craven's newly released first novel, a medical thriller, is the subject of his next film project for DreamWorks.



SCREAM QUEEN

Nominal star Neve Campbell on her reluctance to return to the franchise.

By Edward Gross

SCREAM fans let out a collective sigh of relief when actress Neve Campbell, after some initial reluctance, signed to reprise her role of Sidney Prescott in the upcoming SCREAM 3, to be released on February 4. "I don't want an image," Campbell said of her vacillating on whether or not to play the same role for a third time. "I want to be an actor. I want to play different kinds of characters. I want to be challenged, and I want audiences to see that I'm challenging myself." Then why come back? "To be honest, I just felt that I owed it to fans of the first two. I was also given a nice little contract to do other films, so it's worked out well."

In 1996 the actress starred in the horror film THE CRAFT, and helped revitalize the genre when she portrayed Sidney for the first time in Wes Craven's SCREAM.

SCREAM 3 not only brings to a close Campbell's portrayal of Sidney but, presumably, her horror film career as well. "I hate horror films and thrillers," she laughed. "I'm one of these people who has to hold a pillow in front of my face and cry and scream a lot, if I'm watching one. But these films are a lot of fun."

"I also really like Sidney a lot. Although it's a thriller, and a scary film, and that's what it's about, she also has a lot of things going on in her life that cause her to have levels. Sid-



The horror follows Campbell as Sydney Prescott, who heads to Hollywood in SCREAM 3 to pursue an acting career.

ney is kind of smart and she's got integrity. It seems like your polar opposite to put an intelligent character into a film that entails a lot of running around and screaming and bleeding and crying. But to actually say intelligent things, too—that's a lot of fun."

Campbell started her career at the age of six as a ballet dancer in the "Nutcracker." "Because I'm a dancer, I don't think I was too scared of the physicality of the films," she said. "I actually had a lot of fun. I've always said, 'Oh, I'll never do an action film,' but I had so much fun doing stunts on these films. And I was like, '[Director] Wes [Craven], come on, let me fall out the window.' He was like, 'No,' and understandably so. He's

had some bad experiences with stunts. But I had a blast doing that. And now I'm like, 'Bring on the action films!' Forget the script, I just want to run and scream and fight."

"When the first script was sent to me," she elaborated, "I had said, 'I don't want to do something else that's scary,' because I didn't want to get into a pattern. I don't want people to think that I'm trying to become a horror film actress or whatever, just because that doesn't seem to be the way to go for actors who want to go anywhere. But on the other hand, when I read the script it seemed so incredibly witty, and it was so well-written. It was so opposite from what you normally read when it comes to those films, because it actually, in some senses, pokes fun at itself. Anyone or anything that can do that, is brilliant."

Campbell has enjoyed working with Craven. Noted Campbell, "People always ask, 'Is he really sick? Is he kind of demented? Is he one of those people who, when they were a kid, was crushing bugs?' Like he's doing something really horrible to poor, little animals. But he's not. He was a teacher and he's a philosopher, and he's well-educated. It was really surprising, because he's actually one of the best acting directors I have ever worked with. He's quite incredibly talented, the way his mind works, in the films. It was fascinating working with him." □

Neve or any of the rest of the original team. We're all moving on. What Bob Weinstein said, was, if there was a huge clamor for it, maybe in four years they might do another SCREAM movie, but it would be a totally different story with a different cast of characters. That's the most I've ever heard in that direction. From the very beginning Bob has said very seriously, that this is going to be a three-part story and then out. I think that makes it a little bit more of a treasure for the fans, because they know there's not going to be one next year. So even if there's more money to be made, it's the idea of a limited edition, and then the breaking of the mold, so to speak. The sales will be more, just because of that. I think that's the idea with this trilogy. It's not going to be one of those things that is cranked out year after year. We'll have to wait and see, but I think Bob Weinstein is serious about that."

Since the release of the first two SCREAM movies, a series of random high school shootings across the country has brought a renewed attack on Hollywood for the high violence quotient in its movies, and consequently, Craven felt obligated to examine the script very carefully before shooting began. "We asked ourselves if we thought anyone in the movie looked like they were making violence look cool," commented Craven. "So we certainly had a moment of introspection, but we felt the script was pretty clear about who the neat people are and who the losers are. We were well within the boundaries of a good murder-mystery and there is nothing that is going to incite any riots in public places."

Craven noted that the recent series of school shootings may have more to do with the upcoming millennium than with any influence from Hollywood movies. "It's strange times," observed Craven. "We're coming up to the turn of the century, and I think that puts a lot of psychic pressure on people, especially the sort of loser elements of the culture. It's a time period that, for certain people, suggests certain extreme measures and actions. People might say, 'What the hell, it's the millennium, so



Courtney Cox as TV reporter Gail Weathers, now the host of a Hollywood talk show. Craven had to film nights to accommodate Cox and Campbell's TV jobs.

I'm going to take my vengeance.' That's something that people can fall into during these times, and as a result, I'm afraid we'll probably be seeing more of these sorts of things. It's funny too, that in the latest incident, where this guy walked into a Baptist church in Texas, and killed six people with a gun, there wasn't the slightest hint of him watching horror movies or anything like that. But nobody bothered to mention that. It's only when somebody brings up horror movies as an excuse, that we're charged with causing all of these things."

With the completion of the SCREAM trilogy Craven hopes to occasionally get away from making horror films, as he did recently when he fulfilled a career-long dream, by directing Meryl Streep in *MUSIC FROM THE HEART*, the inspiring story of a Harlem music teacher. Craven noted it's a story that, "shines a light on the best of humanity's impulses," making it the mirror image of his early horror films like *LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT* and *THE HILLS HAVE EYES*, which explored the least redeeming aspects of humanity's impulses.

"I feel you have to face the worst before you can enjoy the best," explained Craven. "That's sort of the way I've lived my life. I think you have to look at

the darkest corners and clear all that out, and figure out how you'd deal with it both as a person and for me, as a series of characters and projects. I needed to vent on the whole subject of violence and I've done that. Now I feel I'm perfectly comfortable doing different kinds of material. I think it's all healthy. A healthy country has cinema of all ilks and they're all useful. So many people wouldn't be going to see scary movies if it wasn't doing something for them. People don't go to be damaged, they go because it alleviates something. They talk about some very painful ideas and anxieties people have, and it helps to exorcise that."

Working with Meryl Streep, arguably the finest actress

Scream King Kevin Williamson, who wrote the first two, had to bow out of *SCREAM 3* due to scheduling conflicts, posing with the mask he made famous.



"People don't go to scary movies to be damaged, but because they alleviate something," Wes Craven said. "They help to exorcise anxieties."

working in films today, was certainly a coup for Craven, especially since she replaced Madonna, after the singer clashed with Craven when the two didn't see eye to eye on the role. Craven laughed when he recalled Streep's reaction to his past work. "Meryl and I talked about the SCREAM movies while we were shooting *MUSIC OF THE HEART*," said the director, "and she said, I just can't watch them. I don't know why people would go to see those movies. My daughter saw SCREAM and now she's afraid somebody's going to come up the driveway after her." Interestingly enough, Streep appeared in a murder-thriller herself, Robert Benton's little seen *STILL OF THE NIGHT*, which at one point was actually going to be called *STAB*. Unfortunately, Craven said he was unable to convince Streep to make a cameo appearance in *STAB 3*.

Craven has also completed his first novel, *Fountain Society*, making this a highly creative period for the director. The book explores a conspiracy hatched by a group of government scientists, who have been researching a project that will provide a select few with a medical fountain of youth. "It was an idea I've had for a long time," revealed Craven, "but I waited until it

was medically feasible to do some of the things I've depicted. I just happened to be introduced to a book agent by a friend, who said she thought she could get anything I wrote with a reasonably good idea published. So about two years ago we kind of casually went around to the publishing houses in New York, pitching the idea of *Fountain Society*, and Simon & Shuster bought it [reportedly giving Craven a \$1 million advance]. All I had to do was go off and write three chapters and an outline, which I did relatively quickly, and they went ahead. Then, it was just a matter of my finding the time to write it. The basic deal was made before I did SCREAM 2, so between SCREAM 2 and *MUSIC OF THE HEART*, I just locked myself away and wrote for about two months. I had an assistant doing a lot of the research on it, and I continued working on it while I directed *MUSIC OF THE HEART*. Dreamworks has bought the film rights, and it will be the next film I direct, if everything works out.

"It's not really a genre film, it's more of a Michael Crichton medical thriller, with that kind of near-future science. There's a lot of action and a love story, so it's not quite a genre piece, although it's not a straight drama, either. At this point I'd like to demonstrate my ability to do different kinds of films, and alternate them. If something great like *THE SIXTH SENSE* comes along, then I'd certainly like to do that too, because I recognize that I have a name in the genre, and the people who support me in doing other kinds of films deserve to have me go out and make a film that will really sell. A lot will depend on how *MUSIC OF THE HEART* is received. It could be laughed out of the theaters or it could be embraced very warmly. Who knows?" □

TOM HANKS ON THE GREEN MILE

An actor's-eye view of the making of Stephen King's supernatural thriller.

By Frederick
C. Szabin

Tom Hanks, just off of *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, had been looking for a script that touched him on various emotional and intellectual levels when he came across *THE GREEN MILE*, based on Stephen King's serialized novel of life and death at Cold Mountain Penitentiary where existed the green-tiled section of hallway that led to 'Old Sparky,' the electric chair that fried condemned men, and was occasionally used as an instrument of vengeance.

"You're always looking for something that's unexplainable," Hanks said of his search for the right script. "Usually, a screenplay this good ends up having a real small amount of buzz that sort of pre-exists. You have your spies operating around town, and I heard Frank Darabont was writing this thing that was going to be eventually coming my way. So I was anticipating it, but I hadn't read the novels and had no real preconceived notion of what it was. When I got it and started reading, every page was a surprise and I realized that I couldn't predict in any way, shape or form where this was going.

"I can honestly say that reading the better screenplays is not like looking at the blueprints of a house," Hanks continued. "It was very much like reading an all-encompassing story unto itself that was an extraordinary



Hanks as prison guard Paul Edgecombe (l), doing his painful duty, readying prisoner John Coffey (Michael Clarke Duncan) for his long walk down "the green mile."

surprise and a brand new thing. And a very faithful adaptation, too, of the novel, which I read afterwards. Sometimes I'm reluctant to read the source material because all of a sudden things have changed and more often than not, the screenwriter has done an awful lot of omitting and compressing until you almost get mad at them. You say, 'Why can't you put some of this stuff back?' But I read the novel at the beginning of rehearsal, and it was like the perfect research because it was just more of what there was in the script. I thought it was the best adaptation of a book that I've ever read, certainly one that I've ever been involved in. I've been involved in some bad ones and some good ones."

Hanks plays Paul Edgecombe, head screw of E Block, the last residence of murderers

getting ready for the final embrace of the electric chair, dubbed "Old Sparky." During the Great Depression, John Coffey is brought to Cold Mountain for the murder of two little girls. As Edgecombe discovers, though, the slow-witted mind and huge body of Coffey house a special power. Also sharing space with Edgecombe at Cold Mountain are sadistic guard Percy Wetmore (Doug Hutchison); homicidal maniac Billy the Kid (Sam Rockwell); and warden Hal Moores (James Cromwell). Hanks feels Edgecombe has a special role among these disparate characters.

"Paul Edgecombe is the observer to all this stuff," said Hanks. "He's not the catalyst; he is almost like a sidebar character to the real instigators of what the story is, and he is de-

finer, I think, very much by the times he was living in, and his occupation. Who in the world would want this job, being head screw of death row in 1935 Louisiana? But, in fact, at the height of the Great Depression this was probably a great job to have. It was for the State; it was steady. It probably paid great money. And, in some ways, you weren't in danger of not having to walk the tiers at night with hundreds of very malicious malcontents around you. Instead, Paul's job is to keep things quiet and calm on the Green Mile until that moment comes where, as officiously as possible, with as little surprise as possible, they take a human being, get him in the electric chair, and justice is served.

"The thing I'm usually a great stickler for, and the reason why I often turn down things, is because I don't understand why the people are doing what they're doing. What's the deal with this character, or that character, other than the usual contrivances of a movie. But here the logic of Paul Edgecombe was set in stone from the very beginning, and it plays itself out all the way through. I can certainly believe at the end of it that John Coffey was his last execution on E Block of Cold Mountain Penitentiary. And you know why because the logic is perfect."

Among the things that affect Paul Edgecombe during his time on the Mile are the people he is



"The Bad Death of Eduard Delacroix," the fourth book in King's six-part series, brought to gruesome life in the film with makeup effects by the KNB Efx Group.

surrounded with, including the truly evil characters of sadistic guard Percy Wetmore, and crazy "Billy the Kid" Wharton. "What's interesting," said Hanks about those particular characters, "is that both are relatively diminutive men. They're not huge, scary guys. They just look like your average Joes, but there's something about their mind-sets that makes them evil and very, very dangerous."

"I think in the long history of Paul's working on the Green Mile he's had a number of these sorts of circumstances, but the bad news here is they're happening at the same time, so it's a little hard to keep your eye on absolutely everybody the way you have to. This is what Stephen King does so well in things that I've read of his. He somehow is able to create these characters who are positive and evil at the same time. It's not like a matter of one side is goody-two-shoes and the other people are distinct heavies. I think you always are able to un-

derstand the motivations of the people who are bad because we've all come across people who are just malcontents; he's just an evil guy, and what are you going to do? He has done that in a way that, with Percy and Warton, are very different sorts of bad guys. And you also understand that. One is a coward and one is sort of a sociopath, but one is ridiculously evil in his pettiness, and the other one is just evil in his disregard for everything. And I must say that one of the great things that is fun about playing Paul Edgecombe is being the dividing line between these two guys on the Green Mile. It's not an easy gig, but when in the grand scheme of things, if your job is to execute people for a living, well, then, maybe you should be able to handle that other problem as well."

Another tenant on the Mile is Mr. Jingles, a mouse of most mysterious repute, first a pet for doomed prisoner Eduard Delacroix, then a sign of magic

TOM HANKS ON STEPHEN KING

"This is what King does so well in things that I've read of his. He somehow is able to create characters who are positive and evil at the same time. They're different sorts of bad guys."

for the men who watch over the Green Mile. For Hanks, Mr. Jingles is one of the most crucial characters in the film.

"What's great about it," he said, "is it's mysterious. What does it mean? Why does this mouse suddenly appear, and then why is this mouse the way he is? I think what the mouse represents is that brand of mysterious serendipity and whimsy that can land even in a place like The Green Mile, that can appear even in a place like death row in Cold Mountain Penitentiary. And when it happens everybody is kind of delighted by it. It's almost the greatest thing that's ever happened just because it's new and it's cute, and it's furry and innocent, which is something that hasn't been seen on The Green Mile in an awfully long time. And, of course, there are those characters that are threatened by that very thing. That's another example of how Stephen King can really have this kind of mind-set permeate everything that goes on in the nature of where this story is."

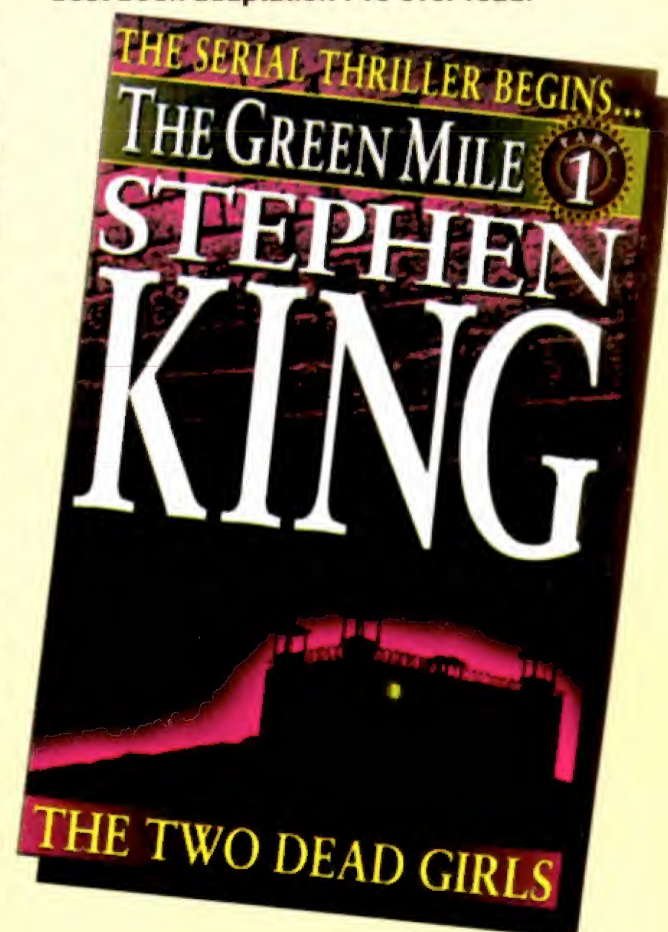
But probably the most important visitor on The Green Mile is John Coffey. Seemingly simple-minded and almost-harmless, Coffey has been sentenced to the electric chair for the apparent murder of two girls. But John Coffey is the holder of amazing powers, and in this place of death, seems to be able to give life with the laying on of his hands.

"The arrival of a new prisoner isn't anything out of the ordinary," Hanks said about life on the Mile. "It happens all the time. But this guy is huge," Hanks laughed. "That's one thing. The guy is really big and really slow. The first thing the guards think is how do we handle this? It's going to take eight guys to bring this down. There's only six of us here. It's almost like, 'Break out the shotguns

'cause anything can happen.' His appearance screams malevolence. You're just anticipating the absolute worst for a while, and when it doesn't happen, and you're thinking, 'Well, that almost makes things that much more scary.' The longer things remain calm, the greater the chances are for all hell busting loose, and that's one of the great surprises that is throughout the story; here we have a short guy, Percy, who is much more trouble than the huge man-mountain that we have down in Cell Number One.

"Paul Edgecombe can't deny the power of John Coffey," Hanks continued. "I think that one of Paul's jobs is to really adapt himself to each one of those inmates. I think he talks to each one of them in a very different way, so that when the time comes they're both speaking the same language, and it happens as easily as possible. There's not a lot of editorializing on Paul's part. They're here, they're like this, let's get it done. In this case, Paul can't deny the fact that John Coffey is

The original serialized paperback. Hanks called Darabont's script "the best book adaptation I've ever read."



not your standard inmate on death row. There is something else going on, and then when the fact that there are physical manifestations, or just whatever mysterious abilities, powers, whatever you want to call them, that John Coffey has, well, he can't deny that either. He ends up being stuck between a rock and a hard place. The reality of Coffey's abilities is the type of thing that shakes Paul's confidence in his own ability to do his job. There is just something about it that is too much of what *The Green Mile* itself represents. And that's one of the reasons why John Coffey is the last execution he oversees at Cold Mountain."

Aside from the aforementioned actors, *THE GREEN MILE* also includes David Morse, Barry Pepper, Graham Greene, Harry Dean Stanton, Gary Sinise and Bonnie Hunt in its ensemble cast.

"This is the best type of movie to make, in all honesty," said Hanks. "This is a great group of people. You're in a company of actors in which everybody has something good to do. That's the most important thing, I think. A lot of times you can work on something and, by and large, people are just standing around. But every actor in this company sooner or later has some juicy part, some really great moment that we all get to watch as somebody else sinks his teeth into the material. It's not unlike being in repertory theater in the early parts of my career in which everybody is essentially pumped up. We had a lot of six, seven, eight-page scenes that take the better part of three days in order to shoot, and it's seeing everybody everyday, being in the scene every minute when you're doing it. And you know what? It's really fun. It's really one of the great added bonuses, and on top of that, it's all guys. It's not like we got to work with kids and dogs or something like that. We've had some very good conversations. And the other cool thing about it is we were all total strangers. I had worked with Barry Pepper before in *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, but by and large, we didn't know who anybody was. And as of the third day of filming we were

HANKS ON THE CAST

"This is a great group. You're in a company of actors in which everybody has something good to do. Every actor has some juicy part. Like repertory [where] everybody's pumped up."



Hanks disapproves of the brutality of fellow guards Doug Hutchison and David Morse. Below: Hanks and Harry Dean Stanton rehearse with screenwriter and director Frank Darabont, who adapted King's *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*.



talking about our lives and our work in a way that is, quite frankly, one of the reasons that it's really fun being an actor."

The warden of them all is Frank Darabont, a writer-director with a healthy history in the genre, dating back to his adapting King's *THE WOMAN IN THE ROOM*, through *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET III: DREAM Warriors*, the 1988 redux of *THE BLOB*, *THE FLY II* and, of course, his highly-respected *THE SHAWSHANK RE-*

DEMPTION.

"I had met Frank at the Academy Award Nominee's Luncheon when we were both nominated," Hanks said of his director. "He was up for *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*, and I believe I was up for *FORREST GUMP*. I couldn't believe his movie when I saw it. I thought, 'Well, here's this three-hour prison movie. That's got to be the most grim thing around, who wants to see that?' And I was utterly transported by this film. Talking to

him, we sort of became acquaintances and when it looked like he was going to be able to do an episode of *FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON*, we began talking like filmmakers.

"I just liked his sensibilities," Hanks continued. "Unfortunately his episode got bumped a couple of weeks and he wasn't able to do it, but I liked the way this guy works. I like the way he thinks, and I definitely like the movies that he's made. When *THE GREEN MILE* came along I thought, 'This is a major talent that I'll be happy to hitch my wagon to for a while.' When I read his script, what was great about it was that I already knew the people who were making the movie. I already knew Frank, so it wasn't a matter of, 'Well, are these people really prepared to make as good a movie as this screenplay is?' And the guy who wrote it is the guy who is directing it and he has a very good pedigree. So, it was very easy, as all the good decisions are, to say yes."

The last hurdle for any film is to find its audience. No manner of critical acclaim could help *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION* find its place in moviegoer's hearts, but Hanks has firm beliefs that audiences will discover *THE GREEN MILE* and enjoy all of the elements that make it such an absorbing story.

"In a weird way, movies emanate this kind of tone that you're buying the journey before you walk in the theater," he said. "The thing you always hope is that the audience is going to be surprised by what they see. By and large, that's what I'm trying to do every time we make a movie. You think you know what you're going to see; come on in, 'cause you're going to see that, but you're going to see a bunch of other stuff as well. If you can do that with any movie you bring out, I think that you do a great service to the audience. The audience is very smart, and they're paying their money to be surprised. They want to see something that they don't expect. They want to come out and say, 'Oh, I never anticipated that in a hundred years.' They love it when they get that feeling, because that's why they go to the cinema." □

MAKING KING'S THE GREEN MILE

Behind-the-scenes, on set with the cast and crew of King's supernatural thriller.

By Douglas Eby

Having made another Stephen King story set in a prison, *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*, director Frank Darabont joked about returning to this kind of setting: "Death Row, 1935, Cold Mountain Penitentiary, the happiest place on Earth, just like Disneyland." But getting serious, he noted the mystical and metaphysical elements of the story are some of what makes the film so interesting to him: "This stuff, the kind of spiritual journey, and touch of magic—this is such an unexpected place to find that, or to bring that in, which has always been one of King's strengths. He [King] credits Richard Matheson with having pioneered that, I suppose, bringing the unexpected into a place you least expect it. Bringing the unnatural into the most mundane settings. Actually Death Row in 1935 is not a pedestrian setting in that sense, but it's an evocative setting to bring something spiritual and strange into." Warner Bros. opens Castle Rock Pictures' production of Darabont's uplifting take on King's supernatural thriller nationwide December 17.

That "spiritual and strange" element revolves around the unusual healing powers of one of the inmates of the bleak death row, known as *THE GREEN MILE* for the color of its floor. John Coffey (Michael Clarke Duncan), a physically huge character, is sentenced to death for raping and murdering two



Sam Rockwell as the Cold Mountain Penitentiary's depraved and psychopathic serial killer "Billy the Kid" Wharton, awaiting his appointment with "Old Sparky."

young girls. As the story evolves, head guard Paul Edgecombe (Tom Hanks) comes to suspect the inmate may, in fact, be innocent, and realizes he has abilities that can prove useful to both of them. Duncan has found his role as Coffey to be a contrast with his prior major role, "Bear" in *ARMAGEDDON*: "This is so different. This is something I've never done before in my entire life," he enthused. "It's very challenging to go from being this big, strong guy, to being a big and strong but meek and mild and very passive guy like John Coffey. But I loved the challenge."

Duncan credited his acting coach Larry Moss for bringing him along as an actor to handle this level of a role: "If it weren't for him, you wouldn't be talking to me. He took me over the hump. He brought out some

things in my acting I didn't know existed. We worked together for like a week and a half before my screen test." As an example of their work together, Moss had Duncan doing some preparation that would later serve him in performing with a mouse, a very significant "character" in the story. "One time I went to his house, and he said I was going to do a scene with his cat," Duncan reported, "and I'm thinking, okay, this man is kind of crazy; there's no way I can do a scene with a cat. But he told me that if I'm going to be a true actor, I should be able to draw energy from anything."

Some of the other denizens of the prison are not at all sympathetic to Coffey. There are prisoners such as the depraved and psychopathic "Billy the Kid" Wharton (Sam Rockwell) and the crazed Edward

Delacroix (Michael Jeter), awaiting death via the electric chair nicknamed "Old Sparky." And there is the sadistic guard Percy Wetmore (Doug Hutchison) watching over the convicts, with the power to brutalize them as he will, except for the intervention of Edgecombe.

Hutchison noted his character Percy is somebody that "everyone loves to hate. Basically, I'm working on *THE GREEN MILE* because my uncle is the governor, so I have connections. Tom Hanks' character, Paul Edgecombe, who's captain of the guards, is kind of stuck with me, and we're at each other's throats the whole time. I do some horrific things on the Mile that start a whole domino effect that unravels the story."

To research his role, Hutchison had wanted to go to a Florida prison that still has an electric chair, but he noted, "We were discouraged from getting any kind of contemporary background because the film takes place in the 1930s, and there was a different kind of attitude in the prison, and in society at that time. The psychology of that is very interesting, but I pretty much had to design my own ideas of what that dynamic is, between the guards and prisoners."

Wetmore and prisoner "Billy the Kid" Wharton, although on opposite sides of the prison milieu, seem to share a certain exuberance of evil. Sam Rockwell (*LAWN DOGS*) was drawn to play Wharton on account of the character's excesses: "He's a wild man. He's on the Mile for



Doug Hutchison as penitentiary guard Percy Wetmore, as evil as any of his prison charges. Hutchison made a splash as THE X-FILES serial killer Tooms.

SAM ROCKWELL, BILLY THE KID

“In interviews of death row people, everybody’s ‘innocent’ and they talk like they’re victims. . . . One guy says, ‘Every day on death row is like that movie GROUNDHOG DAY.’”

killing a patrol officer and pregnant woman, shooting them in an armed robbery. So he’s not a nice guy.”

Rockwell noted his character calls himself “Billy the Kid”: “They call me ‘Wild Bill’ but I don’t like it when they call me that. I get very upset.” The role sounded “very flashy” to the actor, a kind of “twinkle-in-his-eye kind of character” he said. “It was similar to my character in BOX OF MOONLIGHT, but this is darker. This guy’s mean.” Rockwell agreed that playing a “mean” character is really enjoyable: “It is fun, because you get to do all the things people want to do, and you get paid instead of thrown in jail.”

“Billy hates everybody,” continued Rockwell. “In a way, he just wants to play. He just wants to be part of the gang. He’s always fucking with somebody. He really wants to just hurt people. He’s a sociopath. And being on death row, he’s not concerned with consequences, and he truly does not care about anybody. Every chance he gets, he just has fun in any way he can think of.”

Rockwell said he created “Billy” from a mixture of different characters that he’s played before, and found in the role a chance to be scary, something he says he hadn’t really done in those other parts. “I guess we’ll see if it works,” he said with a grin. “I’m having fun with it. It’s good. It’s a fun part. You can do just about everything in this part.”

For research on his role, he read part of *In the Belly of the*

Beast: Letters from Prison, by Jack Henry Abbott, an account of a convicted murderer’s 25 years behind bars, talked with an inmate, and read some interviews of people on death row: “That’s really interesting reading” he said. “Everybody’s ‘innocent’ and they talk like they’re victims.”

Rockwell picked up a manuscript, gesturing, “This is an email that a guy on death row wrote. He says ‘Every day on death row is like that movie GROUNDHOG DAY, it just goes over and over again.’ Interesting stuff.”

Rockwell recalled another story about what prison life is like: “One thing a friend of mine who was in prison said was that he had the runs for a year and a half, from fear. That can tell you something about it.”

Having acted in a number of smaller independent films, Rockwell noted this is one of the larger projects he has done, and

said this is “probably a much more pleasant atmosphere than most sets. I would imagine this is an exception to the rule for studio films. Things are pretty easy-going here. We’re behind schedule, and yet everyone’s pretty mellow. We go in and have a rehearsal, and we kind of wade our way through it, and people are pretty cool. Smaller independent films can be much more uptight.”

Rockwell appreciates the chance to work with director Frank Darabont and actors of the stature of Tom Hanks, and notes “It feels good to know that it’s just acting, really. Tom Hanks is an actor, I’m an actor and we’re just acting. When it comes down to brass tacks, it’s doing the same thing I did years ago, just doing it with more money. It’s the same thing you do in acting class.”

Rockwell agreed that just because the names are bigger, the nature of the work doesn’t change. “And especially with this group, like we have Jeffrey DeMunn, Michael Jeter, David Morse—these are all experienced stage veterans, all stage actors and good ones, character actors, and there’s an ensemble feeling here. A feeling of all of us being in the cast together, no one’s a diva. We’re just there doing a job. It’s not like some big-

budget space movie or something; it’s about the acting and telling the story. It’s a very actor-oriented film.”

Rockwell noted that, unlike most films, THE GREEN MILE is being shot in sequence, which has affected the schedule. “That’s what’s taking us so long, but it’s a great way to shoot, because the story develops as we make the movie. So bruises that I have here, that I’ve gotten in reality, add to the character. And facial hair grows. It makes it really interesting.”

Both Steven Spielberg (a good friend of Tom Hanks) and Stephen King have visited the GREEN MILE set at Warner Hollywood studios. Although not officially involved with the production, Spielberg read the script and “absolutely loved it,” according to Darabont. “I think it was him talking to Tom about it that got Tom to read it so quickly,” said Darabont. “Steven has a great spirit, and he loves to visit a set, especially when it’s not his. I know the feeling: then you’re not responsible.”

Doug Hutchison reported in his online production diary that Spielberg even sat in the prop electric chair, with the steel electrode cap atop his head, smoking a cigar. And on the occasion of the author’s visit, Darabont had a birthday cake prepared for King, with the icing designed to be a replica of the cover of book four of “The Green Mile” series: “The Bad Death of Delacroix.” King reportedly was delighted with the attention, and expressed his wish that the movie would be a huge success and sweep the Academy Awards in 2000.

In a magazine interview, King made some comments related to the themes of this film, and why he writes about those themes: “I think most men are wired up to perform acts of vio-

Hanks with James Cromwell as Warden Moores, a witness to the executions on death row’s electric chair, dubbed “Old Sparky,” until Coffey walks the “mile.”



THE GREEN MILE

STEPHEN KING

Back at the keyboard after his own roadside misery the author looks forward to a cinematic "milestone."

By Patrick Hobby

On the set of *THE GREEN MILE*, celebrating his birthday, Stephen King quipped about his director, "Frank Darabont jokes and says that he has the world's smallest specialty, that he only makes Stephen King prison movies that are set in the past." King is now recuperating from his misery at the hands of an errant driver, and is back at the keyboard. Also upcoming for King is a four-hour ABC miniseries of *THE TALISMAN*, a book he co-wrote with Peter Straub, being produced by Steven Spielberg and Kathleen Kennedy.

In writing *The Green Mile*, King noted that he did more research than usual. "I think I got interested in the fact that so many of the executions went wrong in the early days of [capital punishment]. And that struck me as a really sort of macabre idea."

"Old Sparky" provided the trappings that King fans have come to expect, but from there the author penned a surprisingly touching tale of hope. Noted King, "The human spirit is alive and well even under the most difficult circumstances. And I think sometimes the more difficult life becomes—and there can't be a place where life is much more difficult, than on death row—the more the human spirit has a chance to shine. And certainly there are aspects of this story that are difficult to take because they are so awful, but I think that very background gives some of the foreground where people are trying their best to do their best. It gives it a real sort of clarity and a joyfulness."

King chose to publish the novel in serial form more as an incentive to write it than anything else. "I had a wonderful idea for a story, which became *THE GREEN MILE*. But it was a very difficult story for me to write. When I finally sat down and started working on it, I thought to myself, left to my own devices, this is probably going to be one where the lazy Stephen King triumphs and I'm going to find something that's easier to work on because, in a lot of



King celebrates his birthday and observes filming on the set of *THE GREEN MILE*. After sitting on Old Sparky, he noted, "this is too far into my own head."

ways dealing with John Coffey is a difficult thing to do. He's a very tragic character.

"My foreign rights agent, called one day, and we were talking over a number of things and as he was about to hang up he said, 'By the way, I was walking on the shore, Long Island, where I have a summer place with your English editor and we were speculating about a serial novel idea, which Charles Dickens used to do. I'm wondering what would happen if somebody attempted a serial novel today. You wouldn't have any interest in that would you?'"

"And he expected me to say no, and it was just kind of an off-the-cuff remark. And I thought about *THE GREEN MILE* and I thought if I put myself in a situation where I absolutely have to write this, if I promise people an installment a month for X number of months, it will probably get written. So I said yes and burned that bridge behind me. And once I was locked into it, of course I had to write it."

King noted he was taken by surprise by the serial's popularity and success. He was in Colorado, filming his ABC-TV miniseries adaptation of *THE SHINING*. "The night before I climbed into bed and pulled the covers up, turned off the light and thought, the book is going to be published tomorrow, 'The Two Dead Girls' [the first episode of

the Green Mile]. I thought to myself, I have made the biggest mistake of my life. The thing is going to die in the streets. It's going to be like this stinking, rotten dead fish and I'm going to wear that dead fish around my neck for six months while each episode comes out. Nobody had any idea that it would succeed to the level that it did, least of all me."

King relished his visit to the set of *THE GREEN MILE*, singling out the production design of Terence Marsh for praise. "When they get the feeling, the sense of the book, what's between the lines or what's behind the lines even, then it becomes like wading into your own head. And that's what it's like to walk on the set and to actually walk on the Green Mile. It's like being inside the country of my own imagination.

"And then Frank took me around the corner and said, 'I want to introduce you to a friend of yours. Here's Old Sparky.' Because this is a story about the electric chair and about the early days of the electric chair and about the days when capital punishment was the rule rather than the exception in the United States. It sends a chill down your spine when you see it sitting there in its own little pool of light. It looks so bare and spare. There is no joke about it. There's no little grace notes to it. It's just an appliance. And of course I did what anybody wants to do when they see it, I said strap me in it. And once you get in it, you say to yourself, oh boy, this is like being too far into my own head."

King is pleased with the casting of Tom Hanks as Paul Edgecombe, King's narrative voice in the book. "He fits like an old shoe. He's perfect, perfect for the part. And I knew the minute that Frank mentioned the name to me, and I thought to myself, this can't be, it's too good to be true."

King is pitching himself for more reasons than a top cast. He termed Frank Darabont's script for *THE GREEN MILE* "the best film adaptation I've ever read. This is one of my favorite books. Making the movie is like bowling a 300 game. I'm delighted." □



Offering Delacroix a hood for his walk down the mile, Hanks as Edgecombe, Jeffrey DeMunn as Terwilliger and David Morse as "Brutal" Brutus Howell.

JAMES CROMWELL, THE WARDEN

"People are taught that an 'eye for an eye' is the only equitable way to relieve pain. It ain't so. It savages both the people who experience it and the people who perpetuate it."

lence, usually defensive, but I think that we're still very primitive creatures, and that we have a real tendency toward violence" he said. "Basically, I've said out loud the things that really terrify me and I've turned them into fictions, and they've made a very nice living for me."

The meticulously detailed set for *THE GREEN MILE* is a critical element in providing the context for King's story. Asked about researching the architecture or other aspects of jails for this project or the earlier *SHAW-SHANK*, Darabont noted he's visited prisons "only in films." And, he added, "That's as close as I need to get, I think, for either of these movies, because they're not really 'prison movies' in that sense. They're not some unflinching, documentarian look at life in prison. They're tall tales, told by Steve King, and I'm just trying to retell the same tall tale in a way the audience will enjoy. A movie like *AMERICAN ME* is quite a different thing. It's very documentarian, actually. Very intense and very gritty, and you really want to be more accurate. Here, we make up our own rules. It's our world."

Although King's story and the film take place in the '30s, the justice system is still brutal. James Cromwell (L.A. CONFIDENTIAL; BABE; PIG IN THE CITY) commented that things haven't changed all that much, and refers to Louisiana having "the worst prison system in the United States, and the papers are

talking about how many people die in the system. It's pretty horrible still."

As Warden Hal Moores at the Cold Mountain Penitentiary, Cromwell's character is in charge of the prison, including being witness to executions in the electric chair. Cromwell pointed out that his character's attitude about the system, including the death penalty, is "not explicated in the script. That was a time in Louisiana, during the Depression, when patronage and subservience to the wishes of [governor] Huey Long was necessary in order to keep your job. If you disagreed with Long on any policy, you were immediately fired, or your father or mother, whoever worked."

That information, noted Cromwell, came from a taped quote of a judge the actors were listening to in order to develop the dialects. This judge had been stopped by Long in the halls of the legislature, and told Long he

couldn't vote for a piece of legislation because he disagreed with it, and, Cromwell related, "when he got home, his mother told him his father had been fired. That sort of control went all the way down to who was hired as a janitor."

This political backdrop affected King's story, Cromwell pointed out, such as the part when Coffey, the prisoner with healing powers, is secretly taken outside the prison, to try to help the warden's deathly ill wife Melinda (Patricia Clarkson). Said Cromwell, "Paul, Tom Hanks' character, is very concerned that people who had families not be put in jeopardy as they take John Coffey out to go cure Hal's wife. Because if any of it comes out, they will lose their jobs immediately."

Cromwell, as warden Moores, was witness at other executions in the prison including the horror show one of Delacroix, but had questions about doing the same with the man who has helped his wife. Recalled Cromwell, "I talked with [director] Frank [Darabont] about being there at John Coffey's execution. I thought at first, well, why isn't he there, but [Moores] didn't have a personal relationship with any of the other people who are executed, and he does have a personal connection

with John, so he [Moores] doesn't show up."

Despite the horrors of the story, Cromwell said making the film was a pleasure "because the people are so wonderful. I really enjoy Frank, I always did, and really wanted to be in *SHAW-SHANK REDEMPTION*, and was not right for the part, which was, interestingly enough, the warden.

Cromwell feels *THE GREEN MILE* has a depth and interest in spiritual matters that make it exceptional: "There's a mystery at the core of it," he said. "When you deny the dark side, when you repress the shadow in ourselves and in our culture, you have to, of course, suppress the light as well. If you can't embrace the darkness, and find a humane way of dealing with it, and a way of processing it, what you do ultimately is kill Christ, which is what happens in the film."

Cromwell has a vision for the film stimulating thought about these difficult issues: "My hope is that when people see the film they will realize that in using the policy of executing people, of taking the ultimate revenge that society metes out against those people who transgress, we run the risk of dehumanizing ourselves to the extent that we will not recognize when the miracle is in our midst. Maybe we will look at the whole process as being antithetical to our evolution as a species, to get out of the monkey-body response, and get into the fact that we are basically angels, and that the ground of our being is love and acceptance, compassion and understanding.

"I understand people who grieve, and are trained and taught in this society that retribution and revenge, an 'eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth' is the only equitable way to relieve that pain. It ain't so. If it does, in the odd case, also in the odd case, it destroys an innocent

Patricia Clarkson as the Warden's sick wife, healed by Coffey's special powers, visited by (l to r) Bonnie Hunt, Hanks and Warden husband James Cromwell.



THE GREEN MILE

MICHAEL CLARKE DUNCAN

The ARMAGEDDON star on landing the role of a lifetime as Coffey, Stephen King's gentle giant.

By Douglas Eby

Michael Clarke Duncan recalled an incident while working as "Bear" on *ARMAGEDDON*: "When we were at the half-way point Bruce Willis told me there was a movie coming out called *THE GREEN MILE*. I didn't know anything about it, and he said, 'Michael, I'm telling you right now: You are John Coffey. Buy this novel and study it. You could be this guy, I know you'd be perfect for the part.' So I got the book and starting reading it and couldn't put it down. By the time the movie was over, I'd finished reading the book, and in my heart I said, 'Nobody can play John Coffey better than me.' There was something about this guy that appealed to me. He didn't have many friends, and I didn't have many. He was something of a loner, and a lot of times I'm by myself, and I could feel exactly what he was going through."

Duncan noted that his character "cries a lot, because he can feel everybody's pain, all over the world. When kids are dying, people are getting murdered, he feels this pain. And you notice his initials are JC, just like Jesus Christ, so John Coffey is almost like Jesus Christ in the way he goes about his everyday world. He has no remorse, he doesn't hate anybody, he doesn't dislike anybody. He wants to love everybody, but it's not like that back in 1935 for a gigantic Black man like him, seven feet tall and 330 pounds. There's no way somebody's going to show him love, not even some of his own people, because he's an oddity."

"John Coffey probably travels along railroad tracks or along river banks, where people



Duncan as Coffey, the prisoner with healing powers taking his last walk with Hanks (l) and David Morse. Darabont had Duncan stand on boxes to make him even taller.

won't see him. He probably naps here and there and goes to people's houses to do odd jobs to earn a meal. That's a very lonely world. You don't have any friends, but maybe birds and bugs. He likes them, and they talk to him. And that sounds crazy, but he understands their world, and they understand him. So I draw on things in my life to do this character, some terrible times in my life growing up."

Duncan noted that audiences should be prepared for a very emotional, tearful response to this "mysterious" character, and are going to need more than just some tissues. "They're going to need paper towels for this one," Duncan said, with a laugh. "Coffey is like that, he's going to have you crying and have you feeling, and you're not going to understand the consequences he has to go through, and you're going to leave wondering why certain things happened."

Duncan agreed that most giant characters in films have been monsters, oafs or other types

very different from Coffey: "But he's very kind, very gentle, he doesn't raise his voice, he's never hit anybody in his life, although he has scars all over him," Duncan said, pointing to the extensive prosthetic scars on his upper arms. "But nobody knows why; it may have been from being abused when he was smaller, or maybe from other things, and that's part of the mystery of him."

Duncan said he got acting training early on, at home: "The best teacher I had was my mother. She always told me I had to read with feeling. But when you're in grade school and you have to read out loud those 'Tom, Dick and Jane' books, I would read it with excitement, and the other kids are reading it dull. And they teased me for reading 'funny' and it would hurt my feelings because I thought they were being mean to me. But my mom said I would understand one day, and that if I wanted to be an actor, I had to start reading with feeling. But when you're in the sixth grade, you're just trying to

make it through life. But as usual, my mother was right."

One of the pleasures of *THE GREEN MILE* for Duncan has been working with Tom Hanks, who is, Duncan noted, a "joker. He'll rib you all day. He can give jokes and he can take them at the same time. Working with him has been wonderful. I tease him all the time about *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, and he teases me about *ARMAGEDDON*. And the other night an assistant comes to my door and says, 'Here. Tom wants you to have this,' and hands me this nice box, and there's a watch like trainmen would have, a pocket watch, and it's

engraved with a message from him. I don't know what made him do this, but it was a very kind gesture of friendship. I will never wear the watch, it will go in my trophy case and always be on display. I really thought that was a class act."

Duncan's casting in the role of Coffey even had the blessing of Stephen King, Duncan enthused: "When he visited the set, he comes in and looks at me and says, 'You're just like what I saw in my dreams.' And he said walking onto the Green Mile set was like walking into his mind. And I'm just standing there in awe, because I've seen most of his movies. He was just so astounded about the way everything looked. He gave me his autograph, and it was just like a dream."

"And the other day, Steven Spielberg was down here. And I'm thinking, man, how cool is this: Stephen King, Steven Spielberg, and I'm working with Tom Hanks, and I'm getting paid for all this. It's wonderful, and I'm really enjoying myself and wouldn't have it any other way." □

THE GREEN MILE

ADAPTING STEPHEN KING

Writer / director Frank Darabont on filming King's supernatural thriller.

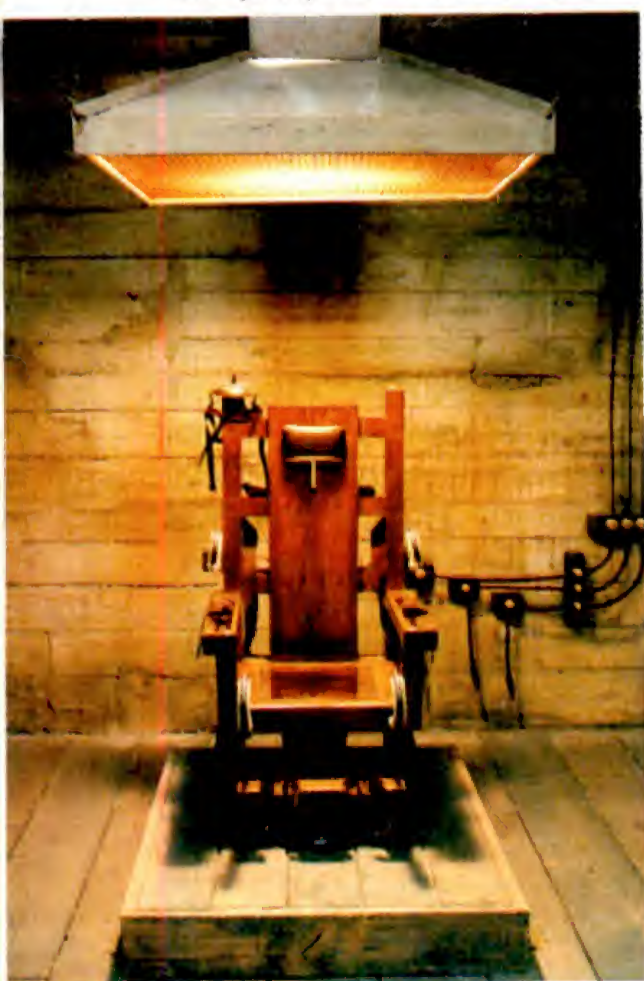
man, an innocent family, it savages people, both the people who experience it and the people who perpetrate it. Us, the wardens, the guards, the industry around it, becomes a madhouse."

Patricia Clarkson, who plays the warden's sick wife, Melinda, feels *THE GREEN MILE* "has many profound statements, a wealth of ideas and thoughts. It takes you on a journey, in many ways: morally, ethically, emotionally and spiritually."

Melinda develops cancer in the story, which was shown through makeup and facial prosthetics by the KNB Efx Group. Clarkson had not done any work before with prosthetics, and noted, "They're extensive in a way, but Howard [Berger] is so talented, it looks so real. I really look like I'm at death's door, basically. And it took a while, because you're walking that fine line of making me scary, and deathly ill, yet not becoming, you know, 'Friday the Thirteenth.' Howard and Frank, who has such a great eye, came together with this amazing look. They built out my cheek bones a little bit, and my eyebrows, to make my eyes really sunken. And I wore contacts."

Working with such a major change in her appearance, first of all meant "My vanity just had to go way out the window," Clarkson said, laughing. "The good thing is I get to look really lovely

"Old Sparky," production designer Terence Marsh's grand guignol vision of capital pinishment '30s-style.



By Douglas Eby

THE GREEN MILE is Frank Darabont's first film as director since making *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*, another film based on a Stephen King story. Earlier he had made his first film from a King story, *THE WOMAN IN THE ROOM* (1983), a half-hour short. Darabont termed *THE GREEN MILE* another example of "bringing the unnatural into the most mundane settings. Actually Death Row in 1935 is not a pedestrian setting in that sense, but it's an evocative setting to bring something spiritual and strange into."

This "unnatural" aspect is something Darabont said he appreciates about the story "very much. It's a wonderful environment for a story like this to take place. A symbol of life being brought into a place that symbolizes nothing but death, really. It's a very interesting crack to fit your story and characters into. Another thing I found very wonderful and attractive about King's story was the fact that there was an opportunity to explore a group of characters in an ensemble way, much like in *SHAWSHANK* with the prisoners, and now we're exploring the lives of these guards. And to show them as the human beings who are responsible for the mechanics of death in a place like this, at a time when it was more accepted than it is now. There is an almost mechanical aspect to it, and to see these men, who were really just working men, who have their own lives, and wives and children, and each other, but happen to have this particular job. And to see how each man responds to that job,



Darabont, who previously adapted King's *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION* (1994) to critical acclaim, calls "action" on the set.

what level of humanity remains in them or is compelled in them by the story—or what erodes that, or what increases as the story moves along. Does the level of humanity increase in our characters, or decrease, as the story takes them through the journey? It's really good storytelling. It's King at his best, I think."

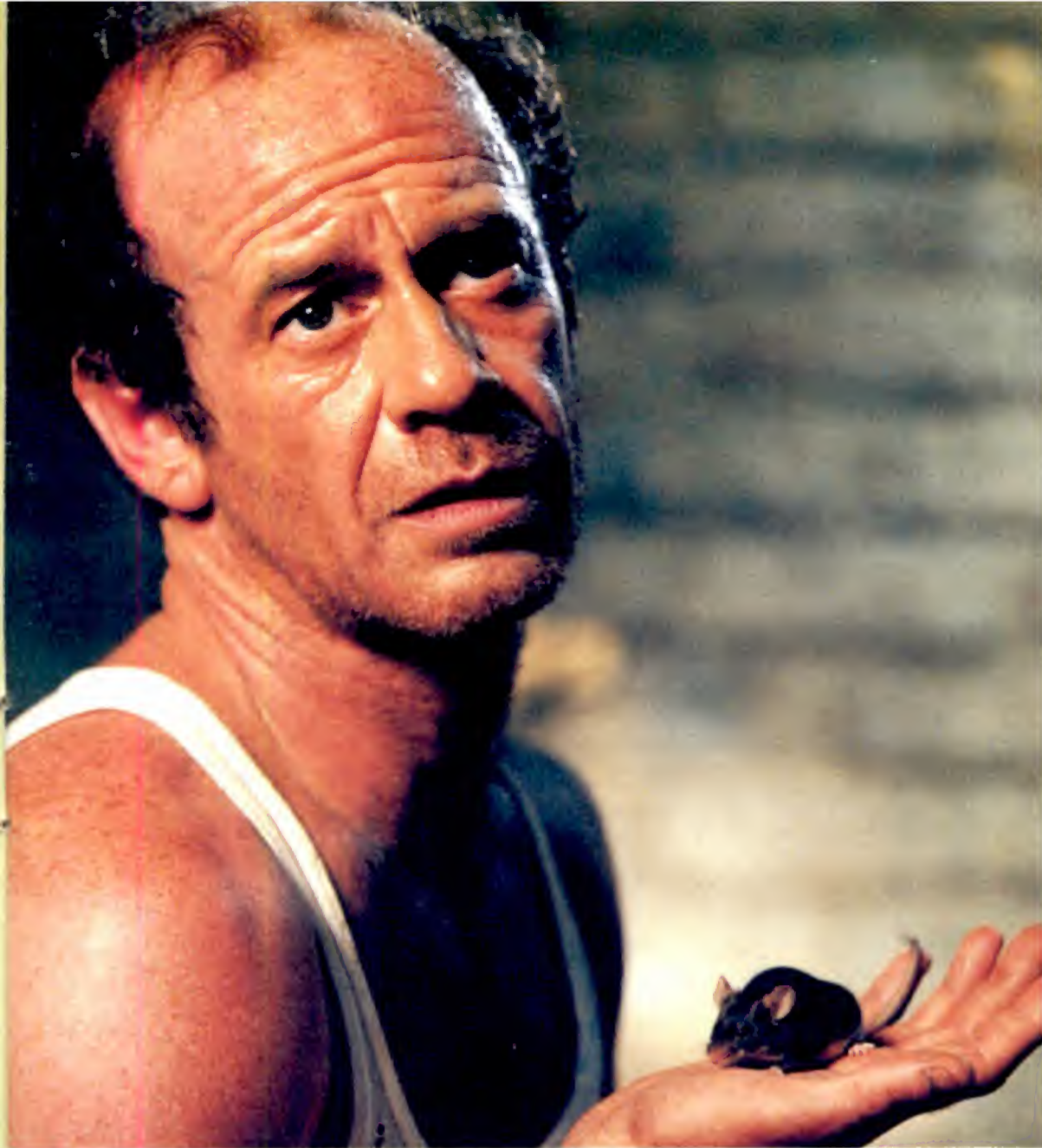
Darabont stopped to discuss *THE GREEN MILE* during filming as the production entered its third month of shooting on sound stages in Hollywood, a length of time that makes Darabont want to "get the hell out of Dodge, and go on location for a month, which we're going to do next week." He noted that length of time on one set is an ordeal: "After a while you try not to, but do feel kind of creatively constipated. We're pointing the same camera at the same actors on the same set with the same wall back there; how do we do this differently?"

He also noted that "half of the conversations in this movie take place through bars. It's

very deceptive when you read the script, because you don't visualize placing the camera for every line of dialogue, or every setup; you're just reading the scene, and guys are talking to one another. It's not until you're actually doing it shot by shot that you realize, holy shit, half the conversations, literally, are through bars. And it's like micro-surgery trying to get the coverage. There's nothing worse than a shot where one of somebody's eyes is blocked. It's just wrong. There's something weird with it. It looks like the actor wasn't in the right place. So you really need to see two eyes, for the most part, and getting that has been a bear."

Referring to a cast member saying the film is being shot more or less in sequence, which is probably unusual for most productions this size, Darabont noted, "Because we're virtually on one stage, and the same set, it seems to be a fairly contained circumstance, and can go somewhat in sequence. Obviously, we have to skip over any exteriors, which we're now going to go shoot out of town. We did something similar in *SHAWSHANK*: because we were almost exclusively in that one location, a big existing prison, we decided to shoot in a sequence of years. In other words, I broke the script down into years; each scene had a year assigned to it. So we would shoot the scenes for 1946. If the production demands meant we wouldn't be shooting in strict sequence, at least we would shoot 1946, and then go on to 1950, and '55 and whatever those years were."

The sets for *THE GREEN MILE*, like the big cell block in



Michael Jeter as Eduard Delacroix, making friends with the Mile's Mr. Jingles.

DARABONT ON DIRECTING

“I’m a little more willing to take chances, visually. Maybe one of these days I’ll feel I know what I’m doing. Every day feels like guesswork, but that’s what this job is, really.”

SHAWSHANK, are the work of production designer Terry Marsh. Noted Darabont about SHAWSHANK, “The two hundred or so cells were all a set. People assumed it was a practical location, but it was built about a mile from the prison, in a warehouse. You literally could not shoot in the existing prison. You need walls that move, you need to put in lighting, you need to be able to design skylights up in the top of the cell blocks, so during daylight you can actually pump some light down there. Plus I wanted to configure it with two tiers, two sides facing each other, and a lot of cell blocks aren’t like that; the blocks are actually back-to-back, facing outward in a lot of those old prisons.”

In spite of the film being a kind of “tall tale” as he put it, Darabont agrees that THE GREEN MILE does not leave grounded reality as such films as BRAZIL have done: “Stylistically, it’s much more in line with a tone of reality than fancifulness,” he said. But there are touches. For example, in the detail work of arches in the cell block itself, there’s some gingerbread, kind of ‘haunted mansion’ stuff going on

there. It’s a delight. When we go on location to the prison about ten minutes outside of Nashville, built around the same time as the one in SHAWSHANK, and inactive, like that one was as well. But the front facade looks like Mad King Ludwig designed it; it looks like a castle from a fairy tale.

“So when they’re electrocuting Delacroix during the storm, I want to get out there and get a shot of the ‘castle’ with lightning behind it. In that moment, it will turn into a fairy tale. It will have what is a very real structure, and what was used as a prison for a hundred years, but if you shoot it in the right way,

in the right moment, suddenly ‘The Evil Queen’ from the Disney movie could live there. So I’m trying to take us into that place in subtle ways, at times, in the movie. Which is fun. It’s fun to try to work those elements in.”

But, the director assures, it is also not his intent to make it a “wild fantasy” at all. “It’s not like COMPANY OF WOLVES or NEVER ENDING STORY” he declared. “There’re are just little hints as you go along, almost subliminal clues. I don’t know how many people in the audience will get that hit, that rush of, ‘Oh, my God, it’s the Evil Queen’s castle’ when they see that shot in the movie, but enough will. And maybe they won’t even realize they’re getting that hit, maybe it’ll be just under the skin. That’ll be a great tonal layer to add.”

Introducing those kinds of subtle fantasy elements help make directing the great pleasure it is for him, Darabont noted, enjoying a cigar outside the sound stage. And as for this specific project, he said, “Ultimately what drew me to it was that it is just a hell of a compelling story. Great characters undergoing some hairy, extraordinary circumstances in their lives, which I think tends to make for the best story telling. And I

have really enjoyed working with my cast.

“My crew is no slouch either. This is an extraordinary group of people, indeed the best I’ve ever seen. This cast has just been a blessing. I haven’t had an asshole in the bunch. I haven’t had anyone who wasn’t a prince. They’re so professional and so pleasant and so there for you, and willing to trust me that it will be okay. I don’t feel I have to convince anybody to do anything a certain way, and that is much to their credit. And hopefully I’m right. Otherwise we’ll all look like idiots,” he added, with a laugh.

Darabont considers THE GREEN MILE an opportunity for him to be “a little more willing to take chances, visually, than I would otherwise in SHAWSHANK. I guess I’m fairly meticulous in how I want something shot, but on the other hand, sometimes if it gets a little sloppy, it gets a little energy into it. You wind up with something that has a little more zip to it. So I’m exploring that a bit. Maybe one of these days I’ll actually feel I know what I’m doing. Every day feels like guesswork, but then I suppose that’s what this job is, really.”

In addition to directing, Darabont has contributed to several films as a writer—THE FAN, ERASER, FRANKENSTEIN, and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. “I gave Steven a draft of that before he went off to shoot it,” Darabont noted. “Let me tell you, it was a great pleasure to work with Steven Spielberg, and a great pleasure to work on that material. I was honored to have done it, and even more so having seen the movie. Two months before it came out, he had a screening for those immediately concerned, and I was really thunderstruck when I saw the film.” □

THE GREEN MILE, death row, 1935, Cold Mountain Penitentiary, an unlikely setting for a spiritual journey with a touch of magic, production designed by Terence Marsh.



THE GREEN MILE

DOUG HUTCHISON

X-FILES' Eugene Victor Tooms tries his hand at a different horror role, that of King's Percy Wetmore.

By Douglas Eby

As a sadistic guard named Percy Wetmore, Doug Hutchison expresses lethal animosity toward the special pet mouse in the prison: "I'm intent on Mr. Jingles' death," he said. "I think Percy could be the spokesperson for some extermination company. But mostly I have it out for one of the prisoners, Delacroix, and he has befriended Mr. Jingles, so to antagonize Delacroix, I end up trying to bring harm on his pet."

Percy's attitude toward the central prisoner character John Coffey is that "he's just another killer, another prisoner on the Mile. I have pretty much a disdain for all the prisoners there, and one of the beefs that Hanks' character has with me is that I don't treat them with any sense of humanity. And from my point of view, they're not human. The reason they're there is to be put to death, to be exterminated. They've done horrific things. John Coffey is there because he's been convicted of raping two little white girls, and killing them. So I treat the prisoners like I feel they deserve to be treated; like animals going to slaughter. I have no reserve of respect for them. And that causes a lot of tension between me and the other guards, because they want to treat them like men, and don't want their last days to be, necessarily, hell on earth, before they're sent to Ol' Sparky. Whereas I want to make them as miserable as possible."

One of Hutchison's more notable earlier roles was Eugene Victor Tooms in two X-FILES episodes, "Squeeze" and the sequel "Tooms," which originally aired in 1994. Hutchison finds this to be a very different role and experience. "Eugene was a blast to play," he exclaims. "Yellow-eyed, mutant, liver-eating serial killer," he laughed. "That was a particular challenge because I didn't have any lines, hardly, so I really had to rely on a kind of quieter persona. Whereas one of Stephen King's descriptions of Percy is 'he brings noise in like a bad smell.' He's loud and grating, someone who wants to be noticed a lot. He demands attention be paid. Because I can't fit in, I feel a misfit, and lash out. But Tooms didn't want to be seen, he wanted to be in the shadow so he could



Hutchison, a popular X-FILES serial killer, as Wetmore, a sadistic prison guard at the Cold Mountain Penitentiary. He has it in for the inmates' magical pet mouse Mr. Jingles.

eat his five livers and go hibernate."

On his upper arm, Hutchison has a ring of tattoos of Egyptian hieroglyphs: "I got this in honor of my grandfather, who died last summer, and we were very close. The symbols represent different letters or ideas in Egyptology. These are his initials, and that little walking symbol is 'travels with wings through the gateway of Heaven' and this is 'R.I.P.'—rest in peace. I went through a book of symbols to find these. I'm not sure it's finished, though. I might add to it so it's more like an armband."

THE GREEN MILE has provided a lot for Hutchison to like: "I could go on and on," he said. "I'm working with my heroes, Tom Hanks, Frank Darabont, David Morse. This has been an amazing adventure for me, from a personal point of view. From a pro-

fessional point of view, I've got to tell you, when I read this script, I cried. I wept. And I've found that's been the reaction of a lot of people. And this is the best script I've read in ten years, so to be attached to something like this is such a blessing. And from an actor's point of view, it's such a challenge, because it's such a rich and colorful character. What I try to do, because I tend to get cast, at least recently, in 'bad guy' roles, is I try to fill it up with as much humanity as possible. When you see this character, even with the horrific things I do in the film, you're going to see a human being and you might even see layers of why someone does something. And if you see that, then I've succeeded, because I've drawn you into my heart, and even though you're repulsed by me, you can understand me. And then the actions are that much more horrific, because they're done, not by a monster, but by a frightened human being. And therein is the challenge of playing an antagonist or a villain. And it's just fun to do that. You get paid and praised for it, and Tom Hanks and David Morse thank you. That's delightful. It's not a punishment."

Hutchison cites one scene as an example of Percy's character: "I'm asking Paul, Tom Hanks' character, to please put me in charge of the next execution. Basically, I'm forcing his hand; I'm saying if he doesn't do this, I'm going to do something in reaction. That scene could be played a plethora of ways. It was actually my audition scene, and when I auditioned with it, I did it very menacingly and almost like manic, and Frank had me come back and he said, 'I'd like to see you really want to do this job, ask him [Paul, the head guard] to give you a chance, to prove yourself. And if you play it that way, hopefully our audience maybe at that point will say, yeah, give him the job, maybe he'll do something good. And then when the dominoes start falling, the stakes will be that much more heightened. So there are little pieces like that, that aren't necessarily written in the script, but you can find them if you scratch the surface. Thankfully Frank, too, is looking for those pockets, so that we're not just going to be a stereotype." □

DIRECTOR FRANK DARABONT

“It’s just odd. There’s cute, funny mice doing tricks; there’s people being electrocuted; there’s bodies being burned; there’s healings. There’s so much weird stuff in this movie.”

when I get out of it. But it’s fabulous, because when the makeup is good, it of course aids you. When the makeup was done, you couldn’t see any lines, you’re just there. And everyone on the set would help me around, asking if they could get me anything, and was I okay. But the makeup really helps take you into your character. It’s always about what’s coming from the inside, but what’s on the outside has to be right, or it doesn’t work.”

As the mechanical and makeup effects company for *THE GREEN MILE*, K.N.B. Efx Group, (K.N.B.) of Chatsworth, California, had a lot of work to do, according to Howard Berger, the B in K.N.B. One job was creating mechanical versions of Mr. Jingles, the mouse who is adopted as a pet in the prison. Berger noted, “There’s a sequence where the mouse gets stepped on and crushed. The character John Coffey is able to breathe life into it, bring it back. So we had to match these itty bitty little mice, and it was really hard because they’re so small. We had four or five different versions. Two were radio-controlled, that could just lay on the floor and twitch. Then we had two that were cable-operated, that could do more complicated, specific movements like breathing and head moving, and mouth opening.” Berger noted that making such creatures the actual size of small field mice was “a bitch.” There was also a puppet operated with rods through a fake floor.

The company’s main challenge was creating an animatronic of Edward Delacroix (Michael Jeter) getting electrocuted in “Old Sparky” which involved a very realistic and fire-resistant mechanical.

Another construction was the son of the character played by Gary Sinise. Noted Berger, “Tom Hanks goes to visit John

Coffey’s lawyer, played by Sinise, to find out about Coffey. And the lawyer says, ‘Coffey seems okay, but he can attack you at any moment, kind of like we had a family dog and it bit out my kid’s eye’—so the kid comes up, and we see his eye’s gone, from prosthetic makeup on this little nine-year-old kid.” And K.N.B. developed life-like dummies for the beginning of the film, an important set-up in which Coffey is seen with two murdered girls, supposedly at his hand. “You see him cradling these dead little girls,” Berger related. “Michael Clarke Duncan, who plays John Coffey, is a huge, massive guy, but Frank wanted him to always appear bigger, like when he’s in scenes with actors, he’s on boxes, so he looks over seven feet tall. So they cast the little girls, and we did live casts of them, and then scaled them down to half size sculptures. We made them out of silicone, so they had a lot of weight and felt real. They’re in the opening scene, all bloody and their clothes are ripped to shreds. It’s really horrific.”

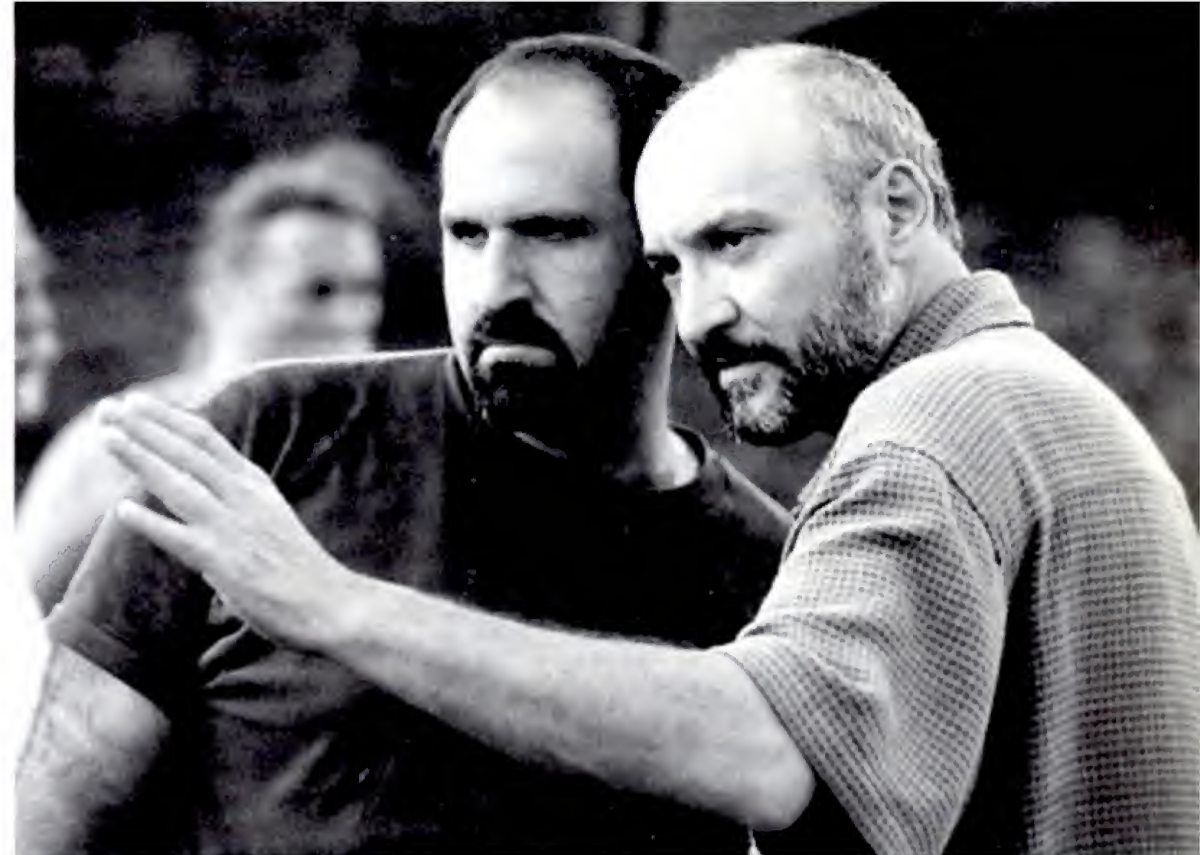
The other primary responsibility for K.N.B. was devising the makeup for the warden’s wife, Melinda Moores (Patricia Clarkson), applied by Lois Burwell. “I did a prosthetic that was a simple brow piece, and cheeks to hollow

her face out, and contact lenses, and dentures, and paint. It really looked great, almost EXORCIST-like. When Lois and Frank [Darabont] and myself discussed that makeup, that was kind of the direction, because Frank loves horror movies. Although I think what Frank was describing was a little over the top for me, so I kind of pulled back a little bit.”

As *THE GREEN MILE*’s animal stunt coordinator, with his partner BettyLinn, Boone Narr supervised the at times complex actions of a team of 24 mice, both male and female, depicting a single “character,” Mr. Jingles, the mouse adopted by a death row inmate, Edward “Dell” Delacroix (Michael Jeter). “They were trained to do specific things in the story, and then we had backup mice to those mice. And also, we had climbers and jumpers, and runners and steady mice and standup mice, some that worked on Dell’s shoulders, or did acrobat things.



Sam Rockwell gets the drop on Doug Hutchison as guard Percy Wetmore, characters crafted by King “that everyone loves to hate,” said Hutchison.



Director Frank Darabont (r) confers on the set with K.N.B.’s Howard Berger. Right: Mr. Jingles, doubled in some scenes by K.N.B.’s lifelike fx puppet.



Sometimes one scene would take all day. And so we wouldn’t wear the little guys out, we’d train several mice to do specific behaviors.”

Noted Narr, “Mice are really smart. They do some things in this movie that are going to make people wonder. Their little minds are like a little computer chip. Once you get them programmed to do something, they do it. They’ve been really reliable.”

Narr’s team started training their rodent actors three months before filming began, using a breed that Darabont had picked as looking like a wild field mouse that might sneak into a place such as *THE GREEN MILE*’s prison. Narr pointed out that in the movie “the mouse ages, so we have another whole set of mice that’s a different breed and looks older for the end sequence in the film.”

While still shooting the film, Darabont said he didn’t yet have a strong feel for how it would come out. “I’m not quite sure what to make of the film yet, and I don’t suppose I will until it’s done and released, and the audience decides what to make of it. Because it’s just odd. There’s cute, funny mice doing tricks; there’s people being electrocuted; there’s bodies being burned; there’s magical events, healings. There’s so much weird stuff in this movie.” □

THE CROW

salvation

James O'Barr's dark avenger gets a third movie incarnation.

By Michael Beeler

The Crow, the mythical creation of James O'Barr that returns from the dead to balance the scales of justice, is set to return. The producers of THE CROW III: SALVATION are proving once again that they are tenacious filmmakers. When Brandon Lee, the lead actor in the first CROW film was killed during production and Paramount abandoned the project, the producers didn't seem to hesitate. They simply enlisted the help of the effects wizards at Dream Quest, finished the film and found a new distributor.

Likewise, when the second film CITY OF ANGELS was released to drab reviews and diminished ticket sales, the producers didn't bat an eyelash. They took the hits to their egos and pocketbooks and then quickly set out to make the third installment of THE CROW franchise. Dimension Films opens the Miramax and Edward R. Pressman production nationwide in the first quarter of 2000.

Sitting in his hotel suite in Salt Lake City, Utah, where SALVATION was filming, producer Jeff Most showed himself to be a stout professional. He openly admitted the failing of the second film, while enthusiastically detailing the reasons for making the third.

"Well, the idea was to move ahead," said Most, who along with Edward R. Pressman has produced all of the CROW films. "Given that there is a huge CROW following out there, I think that we very nearly, after the opening of the second CROW, began a search for a great story and a great writer to work with a great story. The project, virtually, immediately went into development. We wanted to get back into it.

"I think that we could have



Sixteen-year-old Kirsten Dunst stars as Erin Randall in a continuation of O'Barr's gothic love story from beyond the grave, opening first quarter 2000.

done better with the second, in several respects. But, you know, it is often the case that the second picture, in a franchise, does not live up to the expectations of the first. Franchises have been saved, numerous times, by their third pictures and gone on to blossom into bigger and bigger success stories that stand for years and years. Decades."

In order to spark the creative juices of this production, Chip

Johansson, a writer and producer for Chris Carter's MILLENNIUM television series, was hired to write the screenplay from a story developed by Matt Greenberg, who wrote MIMIC. Bharat Narulli, the young London based director of KILLING TIME, was brought in to direct the film.

Sixteen-year-old Kirsten Dunst, who was nominated for a Golden Globe award for her

debut work in INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE and has since appeared to critical notices in JUMANJI, SMALL SOLDIERS and LITTLE WOMEN, was enrolled as the lead actress. And Eric Mabius, who first came to notice in WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE, the Grand Jury Prize winner at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival, donned the face makeup and assumed the mantle of The Crow.

Dunst admitted that she had never seen either of the CROW movies because she didn't want to see them before she did the movie. Mabius openly acknowledged that he was advised to avoid the second film, then went on to reveal that he had an interesting connection with the first movie.

"To be honest with you," said Mabius, who portrays a new, younger, short-haired version of The Crow, "I haven't seen the second one. Bharat asked me not to. So I didn't watch it.

"I did see the first one. Actually, when I was just out of high school—I graduated early—the first film I ever auditioned for was THE CROW. The first one. And the part—after Brandon was set, obviously because I was too young—the part I ended up reading for was the character who ended up shooting [Lee] during the shootings. They actually filmed it. So, I'm not upset that I didn't get the part."

Mabius did go on to play other roles. He appeared in I SHOT ANDY WARHOL and THE JOURNEY OF THE AUGUST KING, as well as two telefilms and several plays, including *Dinner At Eight* and *The Seagull*. He has two well-received independent films newly released on video, LAWN DOGS and THE

“The part I ended up reading for was the character who ended up shooting Brandon Lee in the movie,” said Eric Mabijs. “So I’m not upset I didn’t get the part.”

“That’s the common theme: the crow that brings these people back. It’s about something that tears their souls apart, is not resolved, and they need it to be resolved. And this crow is the guide for them to do this. That’s the common point. And unfortunately it turned out that Brandon wasn’t around to do a second and third CROW. But, it just so happened, with each one it’s been someone different. And I think that each person is bringing something different. I’m not trying to cop out on the answer and make it all pretty. But, I really believe that.”

This film will move *The Crow* to a small town where a young man is framed and executed for the brutal murder of his girlfriend. Returning as *The Crow*, the victim becomes the hunter in order to track down the lethal corruption that killed him and grips the town of Salvation.

Most of the production was filmed on location in and around Salt Lake City, with almost no use of the miniaturized cityscapes so prevalent in the first films. The film will also

showcase some real street smart production designs from two upstarts: Maia Javan, production designer and Tom Meyer, art director. Special effects will be administered by the talents of KNB.

“I think we relished the opportunity to devise an entirely new world, with new characters and a new telling of *The Crow*,” concluded Most. “A new approach to the telling of *The Crow* story, was as big a desire as anything. I don’t think it was an attempt to, in any manner, account for anything other than a desire to move ahead and make something even better than we have in the past. It’s what one strives for artistically.

“When you provide the world a film that was as successful commercially and critically as the first *CROW*, you’re challenged. And you want to come back, with something even finer, more detailed. You’re strengthened by the desire to overcome the odds and make something even more fantastic. And I think, in this respect, we certainly heard our calling. We really wanted to do something very new and fresh. And that’s what we set out to do with *THE CROW: SALVATION*.” □

It’s raining bodies. Bruce McCarty as Dt. Madden investigates another puzzling death in *THE CROW: SALVATION*, produced by Edward R. Pressman Films.



Eric Mabijs as a younger, short-haired Crow, visits the gravesite of his murdered fiancée. Inset: Mabijs in Crow make-up by KNB.



BLACK CIRCLE BOYS.

LAWN DOGS is a phenomenal movie that was a fitting precursor to *SALVATION* in that it showed off both his chiseled, young, agile body and his mature depth as a performer.

“It’s interesting how things come full circle,” Mabijs returned when questioned about the benchmark established by Lee. “I’ve gotten it a hundred times: ‘Is it hard following in Brandon’s footsteps?’ All of those kinds of questions. I’m sure that some people are going to be irate. They were for the second one. You know, for sort of desecrating the memory of Brandon.”

THE CROW was conceived in 1981 out of the haunting memories a young writer could not shake, when his fiancée was senselessly killed by a drunk driver. James O’Barr’s story

was finally published, as a comic book, in 1989 but only after years of gnawing at his personal recollections of that tragic loss.

The gothic story of love and revenge struck a nerve in many who read it. Consequently, new *Crow* stories took root in other comics, books, the films, a television series and a soon to be released video game. Even the platinum soundtracks, from the first two movies, have had a hand in the retelling of *The Crow*.

“People forget that the original story was born out of James’ specific tragedy,” continued Mabijs. “So no one person owns specific rights. *The Crow* itself, the title doesn’t revert to Brandon Lee or the character that I’m playing or Vincent Perez [*The Crow* in *CITY OF ANGELS*] played. It’s about *The Crow*.”

Lost Souls

Cinematographer-turned-director Janusz Kaminski on exorcizing the horror clichés.

By Douglas Eby

Janusz Kaminski has established a reputation as a cinematographer, working on such films as *SCHINDLER'S LIST*, *THE LOST WORLD*, *AMIS-TAD* and *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*. He's making his directing debut with *LOST SOULS*, which New Line Cinema is opening nationwide February 4. The project is much more involving for him, he said, and includes work outside photography. For example, he noted they are doing a "tremendous amount of work" on the sound track. "We hope to spend an entire month doing sound."

Kaminski has commented before [31:8:12] about appreciating some of the horror classics like *THE EXORCIST* and *ROSEMARY'S BABY*, but said there are no specific films influencing his work on this one: "I think in a sense all the movies I've seen, to a certain degree, influence me. There isn't a movie I modeled *LOST SOULS* on. Even if I was trying to make *THE TENANT* or *REPULSION*, I would never make it, because I'm not Polanski. I always think of Polanski and Kubrick, with his sense of suspense and mystery, and Buñuel. These are directors I love, but am I inspired by them? It would be a great honor to be inspired by them, but I think this is just a Janusz Kaminski movie. It's my upbringing and what I like."

Kaminski emphasized that his new title and responsibility as director is "not a transition. That indicates I was in a process of transit. I was not. I am a cinematographer, I love being a cinematographer. It's a profession all its own, and I have no desire to leave it. I'd like to direct more movies, but cinematography is a job I am fascinated by. Next movie I do will be as cinematographer, and hopefully the one after as director." He noted that this is not such a new position



Kaminski reviews a take on location with producer Nina Sadowsky and executive producer and co-scripter Betsy Stahl, melding imagery and story.

for him, and that he's shot commercials for other directors, as well as directing ones himself.

Steven Spielberg has said of Kaminski's work, "Janusz is not one-size-fits-all.... He tells a cinematography story on top of the writer's or director's story, and he designs the photography according to the beats and measures of the narrative." Kaminski, responding to a question about how involved he is on *LOST SOULS* in the photography, said, "The primary difference between being cinematographer and being director is that the means you're using to tell the story are completely different. As a cinematographer, you're telling the story very much in a nonverbal way. You use visual metaphors, you use actors blocking and gestures, and the light and composition to tell the story that's on the paper. In the job as director, you use that, as well as having the great medium of people's performance and verbal story-telling. And that is a fantastic thing to be able to use—the emotions and the words, and I find that is very fascinating. It's completely different from being cinematographer. It's so much bigger than the nonverbal storytelling, and you can real-

ly modify and improve the story, or you can ruin the story."

An interest in spiritual themes in film is something Kaminski shares with producers Nina Sadowsky and Betsy Stahl, working for Meg Ryan's Prufrock Pictures: "Spirituality is very important, for anyone" he said. "We all have it. Whether we want to venture in that direction is another thing. I grew up in an essentially Communist country, that by doctrine negates the church. However, with that doctrine, the church had an extremely strong presence in my upbringing. I was raised as a non-religious person, but all my neighbors and friends would go to church on

Sunday, and wear these beautiful uniforms to take part in the religious ceremonies. My father happened to be a Communist. My need to venture in the direction of religion is really large, so perhaps that was the reason I was interested in *LOST SOULS*, because it deals with a character who is essentially a non-believer, and who starts believing."

As a partner with Meg Ryan in Prufrock Pictures, Sadowsky said their company always looks for material "that will have a strong underlying theme; that will entertain on a populist level that will hopefully engender some discussion. The way Meg and I work is that we sit down periodically and talk about thematic ideas we'd like to address, and we get much more proactive about seeking material, as opposed to just reading everything that gets sent to us indiscriminately. And in different ways, we have done our own explorations of the world of spirituality. Not really religion, which I think is largely the antithesis of spirituality. So we were interested in crisis and spiritual rebirth or reawakening, and felt that this story had a really great construct, because it had a person of absolute faith, and a person



Winona Ryder is high on the film, which opens February 4, after postponement of its debut last October 1.

of no faith, and a situation that required the two of them to function cohesively together, from opposing theological and philosophical viewpoints. And we thought that construct was a really interesting one to hang a thriller on, that we could deliver all the chills and the spills, and the unnerving, unsettling elements that this story certainly delivers, but at the same time have a kind of smarter, and deeper backstory that smart viewers will get. Some people will just go along for the ride, and scream at the scary moments and enjoy the effects, and I think other people will come out challenged and moved by the experience."

The nature of evil is something Sadowsky finds very interesting, noting that it is "such a gray area. One of the fascinating questions is when is doing something for the right reason not evil? If you ask someone off the street if killing is wrong, they would probably say yes. But Father LeBar mentioned that he supports the death penalty, which I thought was fascinating for a Catholic priest." Father James LeBar, appointed one of four exorcists for the archdiocese of New York, is a consultant on the film. He warned the production company they should "be careful" because he knew the priest who consulted on *THE EXORCIST* and there were all kinds of "strange occurrences" while making that film. Fortunately, the production went forward without any significant paranormal events.

One of the film's screenwriters, Pierce Gardner, said he has appreciated the way Kaminski's directing choices create scenes that will keep the audience uncertain and unsettled. Kaminski affirmed he wanted to create a sense of "despair and bleakness and things that are not always explained, and mystery.

The world that in a sense appears to be very normal is not what it appears to be."

Kaminski recalled a line that a character has in the story: "All my life has been a lie." He realizes that his entire life has been orchestrated to fulfill one function: on the day of his 33rd birthday, he will be possessed by the Devil. So it's about that as well. What appears to be normal, is not necessarily normal. Don't take things for what they are presented to you directly. Look for something, not just the surface."

Kaminski was actively involved in casting, and noted that Winona Ryder chose to be part of the film "not only because of the spirituality of her character, but because this character is different from the ones

Possessed by the Devil: priest John Hurt exorcises Ryder, who discovers a coded message that reveals a plot to unleash Satan in human form.



“Exorcism is as real as anything you can imagine. If you believe in God, then you believe in the Devil, then you accept exorcism.”

—Director Janusz Kaminski—

she's used to playing. She's the messenger. She's a woman who is very much self-determined and driven to find who will be the next one possessed, and prevent it. She's very non-sentimental, determined."

Ryder's character, Maya Larkin, has been described as a "woman of faith" who uses her vast knowledge of Satanic scripture to try to prevent the conspiracy to enable the devil to walk the earth in human form. But, Kaminski noted, her spiritual beliefs are not "like a fanatical faith in God. It's more that, in her previous experience she was on the other side. She was possessed by the Devil as a young girl and an exorcism was performed on her. She's got a very personal and intimate way in, in terms of understanding the Devil's work. She believes that the Devil exists truly in this movie, because she's experienced it."

Speaking of exorcism, Kaminski said, based on his research, "This thing is as real as anything you can imagine, if you believe in religion. It's very much a Judeo-Christian concept, more Christian than Judeo. If you believe in God, then you believe in the Devil, then you accept exorcism. And examples of exorcism are on the rise, because of the Millennium. It's a concept, or maybe a phenomenon, that's truly accepted and acknowledged by the church, and there are assigned priests who are certified, if I may say that, to perform exorcisms."

Returning to the question of what his debut as feature director has meant to him, Kaminski declared "directing is the most challenging and the most rewarding aspect of being a filmmaker. I always did have tremendous respect for directors and actors, but my respect is even higher. It's such a fragile profession, to be a director or actor. And I have a much higher appreciation of a good story. And I understand so much more why directors become a little bit eccentric, why they become emotionally damaged, you know. Because it's such a delicate profession. I also understand why those who are successful are rewarded so much, because this is truly a director's medium. Directors are responsible for the movie. If it's good, if it's a great success, of course there are many people who are responsible; but if it fails, they are the only one." □

SUPERNOVA

MGM's troubled outer space epic, rocked by the departure of director Walter Hill.

By Dale Kutzera

In the my-explosion-is-bigger-than-your-explosion gamesmanship of blockbuster filmmaking, the producers at Hammerhead Films and United Artists may be playing their trump card with this January 14, 2000 release, starring James Spader and directed by an uncredited Walter Hill. In a dispute with the studio, Hill reportedly asked that his name be removed when UA insisted on testing the film before Hill could do what he considered necessary reshoots.

Ironically, for all the implied spectacle, *SUPERNOVA* began life as a modestly budgeted B-movie. The film places the emphasis on its same-size-as-life characters, and owes more to the thought-provoking science fiction of the '50s and '60s, than the razzle-dazzle comic-style fantasy popularized by director Roland Emmerich (*INDEPENDENCE DAY*) and producer Jerry Bruckheimer (*ARMAGGEDON*.)

"This is a human story," said Dan Chuba, producer of the film and—along with Jaimie Dixon,



In deep sh—ah, space—producers Jamie Dixon (l) and Dan Chuba on the set, weathering the departure of the film's director during post-production.

Thad Beier, and Rebecca Marie—partners at Hammerhead Films, a supplier of computer generated effects to scores of films including *BATMAN RETURNS*, *SPAWN*, and *TITANIC*. "It is not a typical action movie. There are some big spectacular events—Digital Domain is creating 250 to 300 effects shots—but there are also a lot of moments about people talking to each other about science. The

risk is that we are making a serious movie. Like the ending of *PLANET OF APES*, not everything is wrapped up."

SUPERNOVA concerns the skeleton crew of the *Nightingale 229*, an emergency medical vessel that services a remote mining region of space. Responding to a distress call from a mining operation on a rogue moon, pilot Nick Vanzant (James Spader) finds only one survivor, Troy Larson (Peter Facinelli). Larson brings with him a mysterious alien object that has a most unusual affect on anyone who touches it. As the alien entity infects the crew, the *Nightingale* is pulled toward a giant star about to go supernova.

SUPERNOVA began as a modestly-scaled story developed by producer Ash Shah and written by writer-director Bill Malone. Recalled Malone, "In 1991 I was asked by Ash Shah at Imperial Entertainment to come in and write a script like a movie I wrote for Transworld called *CREA-*

TURE. So I pitched an idea to them, basically *DEAD CALM* set in space. They liked it a lot, and I drafted up a script called *DEAD STAR*. We got into some heavy pre-production. I spent two months developing the film with an art director. I was going to be the writer-director on the picture and what happened was it turned out to be a \$5 or \$6 million picture—beyond the scope of what Imperial wanted to do. At that point the picture fell by the wayside."

Good ideas never completely die, however, and years later *DEAD STAR* rose from the ashes. "Shah had this project nine years go," continued Chuba, "but it was too expensive. He couldn't do it the way he wanted to and years later, when he wanted to get involved with us on a business level, he brought a couple scripts over and one was *DEAD STAR*. Bill Malone is an excellent writer and did some great work on it. We liked where it was headed and suggested some significant changes. Ash agreed to those and said, 'You go ahead and write it. Make the changes.'"

Visual effects by Digital Domain, a plun

Hill directs Robin Tunney (l) and Peter Facinelli, on board the deep space emergency medical ship *Nightingale 229*, servicing a remote mining quadrant.





PERNOVA

WALTER HILL

Original ALIEN on taking a science fiction, a favored genre.



and working relationship with Frank Mancuso, president of MGM, parent company of United Artists, the stu-



James Spader as pilot Nick Vanzant, responding to a distress call from a mining operation on a rogue moon near a giant star about to go supernova.

Chuba wrote two successive drafts of the script, with partner Jaimie Dixon attached as director. Shah later brought in writer Tom Wheeler for a polish. In the rags-to-riches tradition of Hollywood screenwriting, Wheeler was paid a relative pittance for his work on the script, then promptly went on to sell another script to director Jan DeBont for a high six-figure

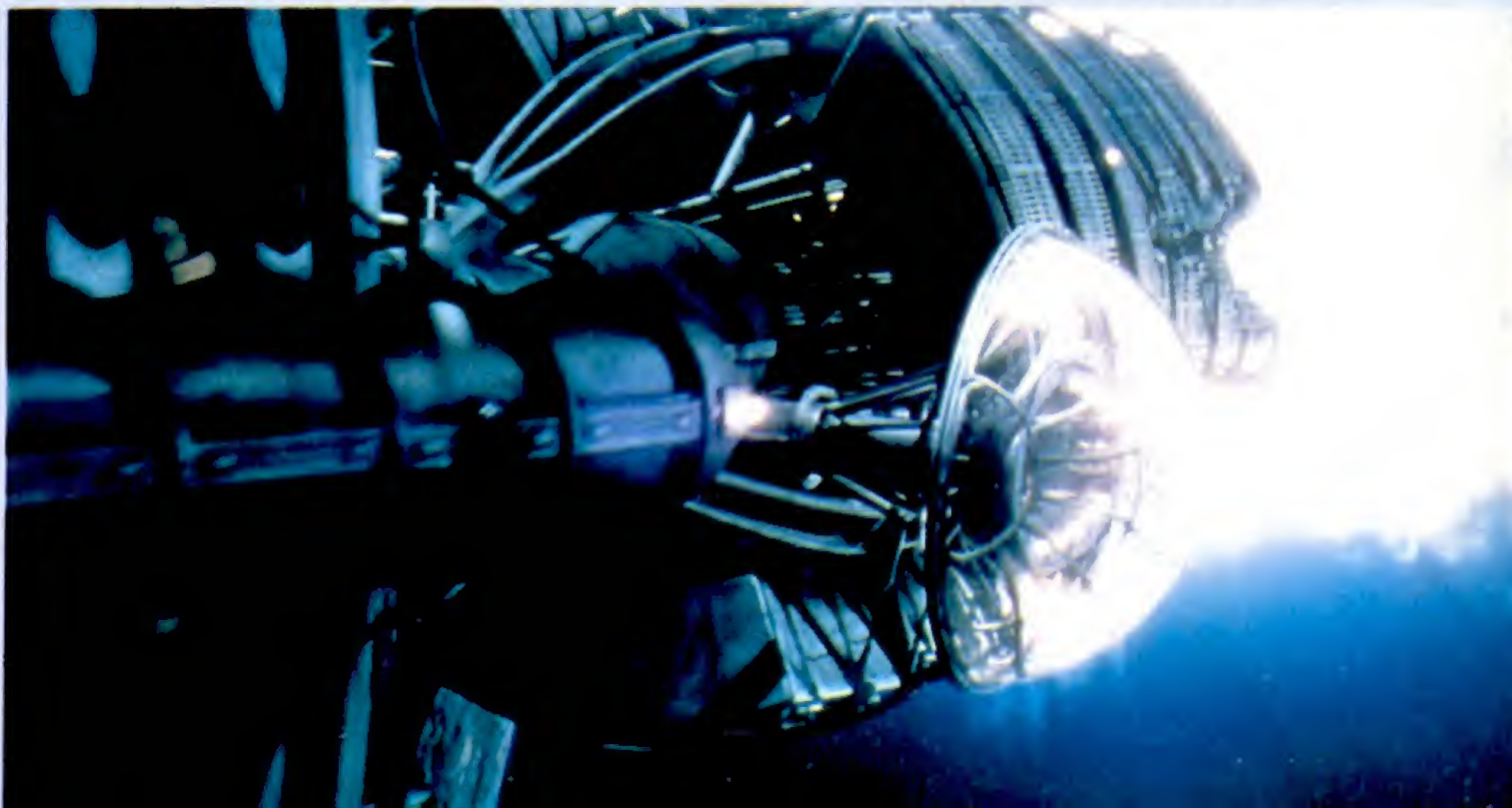
pay-day. The script that would become SUPERNOVA, however, was still not ready to be shopped around to the studios, and Chuba took another crack at it, his third re-write.

The response was positive. Not only was the story a potential franchise vehicle, but Hammerhead's expertise as a visual effects supplier meant the project could deliver a big-budget

spectacle for a fraction of the cost. As Chuba explained, in the strange economics of Hollywood, a film with a physical production cost of \$50 million would require the presence of a major international star—a Schwarzenegger or Willis—to guarantee a big opening weekend and overseas boxoffice. The cost of such a star, now in the \$20 million range, would push

the budget into the \$70 to \$100 million stratosphere—the typical cost of a summer blockbuster. By designing a story that takes place in a limited number of sets, with a limited number of characters, the producers of SUPERNOVA kept the physical costs to such a level that allowed them to cast talented, but edgier actors, many not previously associated with the science fiction

of exhaust comes off the Nighthawk's engine (l) and the ship's SILENT RUNNING-like observation dome, among 250-300 effects shots completed after Hill left the project.



PRODUCER DAN CHUBA

“This is a human story. It’s not a typical action movie. There are many moments where people talk to each other about science. The risk is that we are making a serious movie.”

adventure genre. In addition to Spader and Facinelli, SUPERNOVA features Angela Bassett as medical officer Kaela Evers, Robert Forster as Captain A.J. Marley, Lou Diamond Phillips as medical technician Yerzy Penalosa, Robin Tunney as paramedic Danika Lund, and Wilson Cruz as computer technician Benj Sotomejor.

SUPERNOVA attracted the most interest from United Artists. Based on several studio notes, Chuba wrote a fourth draft which met with their approval. A deal was signed, but there was a catch: due to the greatly increased budget, Dixon could no longer be considered as director. “We were clearly over \$20 million no matter how we sliced it,” said Chuba. “That was the zone in which Jamie could direct the picture. There was no sense putting the pressure on him and having his career live or die on this film. It could become a story of a first-time director being giv-

en too much rope. So he moved into producer role with me.”

At this time in its development, the project entered a difficult period. United Artists was being sold and a new regime could kill the project. “Everything shut down,” said Chuba. “We didn’t even know we had a picture sold.” Fortunately the situation resolved itself for the best, with Frank Mancuso, a firm believer in the project’s franchise potential, remaining in charge at MGM, UA’s parent company. Lindsay Doran, producer of SENSE AND SENSIBILITY and other films, was brought in as president of United Artists. “We thought it would be great to work with her,” said Chuba. “She never saw this as another ARMAGEDDON or LOST IN SPACE. She got the throw-back to earlier science fiction, a thinking man’s science fiction, like PLANET OF THE APES, OUTER LIMITS, or TWILIGHT ZONE. There is something to

think about here. It’s not like a war or combat film.”

The producers were not intimidated by the competing deep-space film EVENT HORIZON. Although both films were at one point racing neck in neck toward production, the longer development of SUPERNOVA meant that HORIZON was filmed and released months before SUPERNOVA went before the cameras. The disappointing critical and public response to HORIZON confirmed the filmmakers’ belief that a straight horror film was not the way to go. “Paramount was aware of ours and at one point we were in a race for production,” said Chuba. “Due to the turmoil at UA, it became a non-issue. They made a haunted house horror film. We had no intention of doing that.”

Chuba, however, had to step aside as writer when the studio brought in David Wilson to take

the script in the direction they wanted to go. He took the decision in stride. “It’s hard being rejected,” he admitted. “You have two choices: fight with them and gauge their resolve—do they know what they want, or are they just grasping? Or, being new at this, you could say, ‘It’s their money. Their movie. They’ve done this before. They made a good case. Let’s see where it goes.’ We followed Lindsay’s leadership. She wasn’t ramming something down our throat. We didn’t feel we were making artistic compromises. In some ways they were making the film more castable. It was a pretty tight little scary movie, but it wasn’t character driven. They wanted the characters more fully rendered, and David Wilson came in and did that.”

Doran also brought on board a director, Geoffrey Wright, the Australian visual stylist best



Spader as Vanzant traverses the gantry of the moon mining colony (below), establishing shot by Digital Domain. Right: The shuttle makes a moon landing.



SUPERNOVA

DIRECTOR WALTER HILL

The producer of the original ALIEN on taking a long-overdue stab at science fiction, a favored genre.

By Dale Kutzera

Having directed westerns (WILD BILL, THE LONG RIDERS, GERONIMO: AN AMERICAN LEGEND), a comedy (BREWSTER'S MILLIONS), thrillers (TRESPASS), and practically invented the buddy-cop film (48 HOURS), it seems the only genres director Walter Hill hasn't explored are the musical and science fiction. Even that isn't completely accurate. Hill's blues-inspired CROSSROADS had plenty of music, and he produced (and did a considerable amount of writing on) the first ALIEN film, and he directed the futuristic STREETS OF FIRE.

With SUPERNOVA, Hill planned to return to the science fiction realm with a story that harkens back to the gee-whiz novels and movies he enjoyed during his youth in the 1950s. While the effects are state-of-the-art and the acting top drawer (the cast features two Academy Award nominees), it's clear from the sets and costumes of the medical vessel Nightingale 229, that SUPERNOVA owes a great deal to such sci-fi classics as FORBIDDEN PLANET and ANGRY RED PLANET.

"I've always liked science fiction," said Hill in his laconic, gravely voice, "though I think most science fiction movies are appalling. I've been interested in science fiction since I was a kid. I kind of shied away from directing science fiction before, maybe because of the effects work. Twenty years ago, you had to take a year and a half or so of your life and not only



Veteran director Walter Hill on the set of the Nightingale 229. After parting company with MGM over artistic differences, Hill had his name removed from the film's credits.

shoot your movie, but go through the [effects] lab. It's changed radically in the 20 years that I've been a director. Now they can do things much, much faster and you can draw the [effects shot] and they do it and it comes back to you in a reasonable amount of time. You don't have to go in every day and get involved with stop-motion photography, for instance, which is like watching paint dry. I like to make things hap-

pen in front of the camera and I wasn't as terribly interested in a lot of the effects work. I didn't have the stamina. Now, as I say, the nature of the effects work has changed enormously."

Hill's decision was somewhat forced by the bind the production was in with the departure of its original director Geoffrey Wright. With only five weeks before the start of shooting, Hill signed-on based in part on his long-standing friendship

and working relationship with Frank Mancuso, president of MGM, parent company of United Artists, the studio that is producing the film with Hammerhead Films and Screenland. While the story intrigued him, Hill wanted to take a new approach to its telling and set out, with writer/producer Dan Chuba and writer David Wilson, to revise the script.

"I think the previous version was probably more interested in what I find the least interesting about science fiction," said Hill. "That is the predictive element. A lot of people are interested in science fiction, because they want to know how people will live in the future. I think science fiction is worthless in that capacity. It is important and interesting as literature. I don't think that it can be sound in a predictive sense. That's my own particular taste. I know that it is not universally shared and I don't mean that I am right and they are wrong, but it is what's of interest to me."

Part of Hill's job was to soften the inevitable comparisons to ALIEN, which also features a ship responding to a distress signal and bringing an alien entity on board. "These are very different stories," said Hill. "The ALIEN series evolved into a very different thing than we started with. I was most invested personally in the first one, although oddly enough, I have less credits on the first one than I do on some of the others. I didn't have anything to do with the last one [ALIEN RESURRECTION]. I haven't even seen it. I thought



Filming Spader's harried moon rescue mission. Hill sought to bring his visceral cinematic style into a futuristic setting using hand-held camerawork.

they should have quit with three. It was an honorable conclusion to what should have been the series. I never understood any reason to get back into it other than monetary reasons."

Hill's input into the SUPERNOVA script impressed the actors, some of whom had already been cast, such as Robin Tunney, and others who had yet to sign on-board. "He really fleshed out the script and made it much more about the people," said Tunney. "Every character was much better developed and he really made sense out of everything. He's remarkable. I wish he was my father. He's one of the coolest men in Hollywood. A straight-shooter, honest, and not full of it—and that's really rare."

For Lou Diamond Phillips,

the new emphasis on character was the key for him to do the film. "I had read this script a couple evolutions ago," said Diamond Phillips, "and told them there's nothing on the page for me. The characters were a bit interchangeable at first and so the story didn't have as much impact. And as much as I love the cast and would love to be part of this film, I have to have something to do. And [Walter] promised me it's getting better. Day by day he passed me a couple of pages and the proof was in the pudding. It was right there. What Walter did that got me on board was go in and make each character an individual. So that if they do die—and people do die in this—you will at least care and feel like you knew them. He's picked the pace up immensely and really

DIRECTOR WALTER HILL

"I didn't want the movie to look like everybody else's space movie, which is what I call—with no disrespect—David Lean in space. Very classical and rich photography."

given a dramatic dynamic to a lot of the scenes."

"I try to make interesting stories and characters," said Hill. "Sometimes the stories lead the character, sometimes the characters lead the stories. LAST MAN STANDING is a good example of a character leading a story. The plot is very subservient to the notion of character. In science fiction, you are not allowed that luxury. It's a cliché among directors that the characters are everything—even in science fiction—but that's not true. Science fiction is, by definition, premise oriented. It doesn't mean you don't try hard to have good and strong characters, but to do Tennessee Williams on a spaceship doesn't quite meet the definition of what science fiction is."

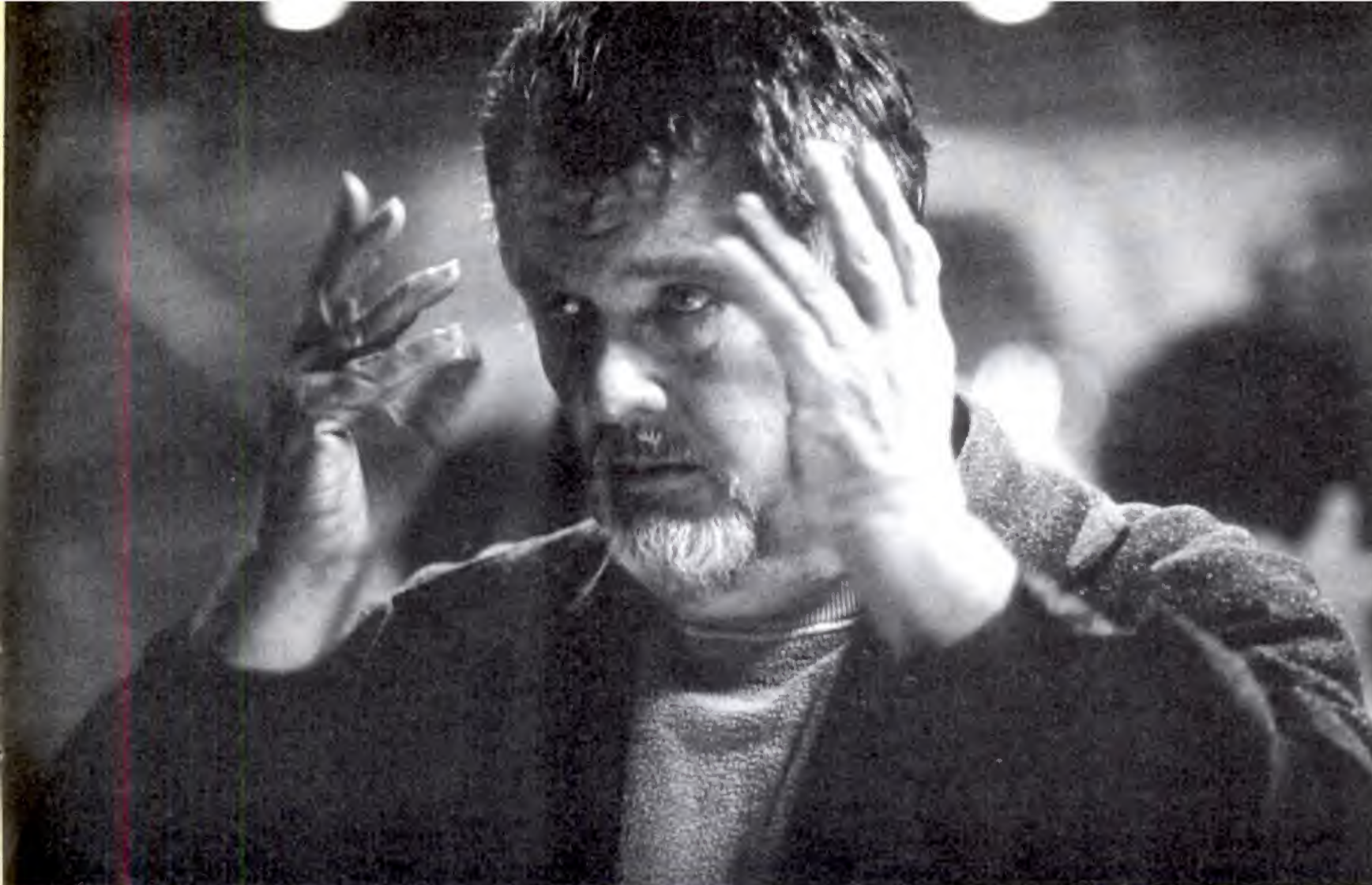
Hill brought with him his well-oiled machine of a crew—all veterans from his past films. In addition to revising the script, Hill worked with production designer Marek Dobrowolski to revise the sets, many already built. "Walter had a very difficult job," said Dobrowolski. "I enjoyed the collaboration. Walter is a person who does not impose a vision, or is not so strict that it's only

his. He will listen to you and we felt we had to tell him about the world we wanted to create. The concept of the movie was locked, in a way, and he accepted the concept and then we just had to explain what worked and what didn't in this world."

Hill wanted to bring his traditionally visceral cinematic style to this futuristic setting. Where science fiction films have traditionally featured their alien worlds and outer-space vistas in stately compositions, Hill hoped to interject a degree of hand-held realism. "I didn't want the movie to look like everybody else's space movie, which is what I call—with no disrespect—David Lean in space. Very classical and rich photography. I'd be happy to have a David Lean shot, but there is this kind of formality to it that seems to lie across most of the work of the last 15 years or 20 years. When I was a kid, there were some rough-edged movies, because they were cheap. Some of the better directors, because of the conditions they were forced to work under, had to make virtues out of problems. And as the science fiction films became better funded, there came a whole new richness and formality to it

Hill rehearses (l to r) Lou Diamond Phillips, Robin Tunney and Angela Bassett.





Hill acknowledged science fiction as a genre of ideas, "Tennessee Williams on a spaceship doesn't quite meet the definition," he said, yet he worked on the script and with actors during production to better define the characters.

all. Because of the effects work, they often use wide-angle lenses, locked-down cameras, and just dolly movies. And science fiction guys like to work off story-boards. I don't. Then all I'm doing is executing an idea I had at my desk three months before. Let me say, however, that there have been wonderful filmmakers who do just that; Hitchcock is the most obvious example."

Hill's style, and Dobrowolski's submarine-like sets, required the extensive use of hand-held cameras, frequently two at a time for extra coverage, and the compressed look given by longer lenses. "I'm trying, in a very minor way, to move it on to something else," Hill continued. "I wanted this to be a dirtier frame look. I have my own technique which is you get the actors in and work the scene out and get it so you like it—move the dialogue around if you need to—and then you figure out how to shoot it. I said I had to work this way on the movie before I came on. I'm trying to do what you don't normally see in science fiction movies: I'm quite willing to have this movie very rough around the edges in order to give it a sense of immediacy and keep it moving. Luckily, I'm pretty fast at that. One of the ways is to use more cameras. I've been using

the two-camera technique ever since my second movie. And the hand-held business gives it a sense of immediacy and after a while you don't really notice it. It's a funny thing, but if you shoot everything off a dolly, in a very straight-forward way, and then do a very hand-held shot, it looks odd. But if you shoot everything hand-held, then you just accept it as the style of the movie and it doesn't call attention to itself."

Hill's direct, no-nonsense approach made for a fast-paced set, requiring intense focus on the part of the crew and actors. "What he does is fix the page and then he expects you to bring your work to it," said Diamond Phillips, remarking on an intricate fight scene between his character and the film's villain Troy Larson (Peter Facinelli.) "For this last sequence, two takes got it. If it ain't broke don't fix it. Don't sit there and marinate over it. The man has made God knows how many films—some of them real classics—so you figure he knows good acting by now. And you go to dailies and not only does it look visually stunning and gorgeous, but the work is up there."

"He said something at the beginning of the shoot that was great," said Tunney. "Nobody knows your character better than you, and nobody knows

the story better than me."

Hill's films, regardless of the genre, are often compared to the black and white parables of the classic westerns, and *SUPERNOVA* is no exception. "A lot of people over the years have written about the mythopoetic orientation of some of my work as if I had all this stuff in mind. I'd love to tell you that I do, but I don't really. I just work them out in terms of stories and characters. I think there is a kind of common thread between science fiction and westerns. You're always picking up the paper and reading that someone is trying to do *THE SEARCHERS* as a sci-fi movie. Westerns are, at the bottom, trying to work out stories and problems with characters that are usually beyond the purview of organized society and all the controls of society. Science fiction can be kind of frontier oriented. Obviously, it's a different frontier, but they share that premise. We've got a drama inside a spaceship with a mysterious stranger. Other than the technology, how is that different than a stagecoach or a train going across the west? In one sense it is interchangeable, in another sense, science fiction is very different than any other form of literature in that it has to ask larger speculative questions to be really interesting." □

known for the film *ROMPER STOMPER*. With Wright on board, pre-production started in earnest. Casting proceeded, Marek Dobrowolski began designing sets and spaceships, scientist Jacklyn Green was enlisted to provide a plausible basis to the film's 22nd-century setting.

There may be no greater challenge for a production designer than a science fiction film. While a contemporary story draws from the world around us, and a period piece can be researched for authentic detail, the realm of science fiction and fantasy often calls upon a designer to create an entire universe from scratch.

Dobrowolski, whose previous credits include *THE CRAFT*, not only had to envision a universe some 150 years in the future, but also satisfy the dramatic goals of Wright and later director Walter Hill, and counter the inevitable comparisons to other science fiction films. Gone are the days when big budget sci-fi films were rare and the design styles plentiful. *STAR WARS* cornered the Hildebrandt-style fantasy look. The *STAR TREK* films redefined future-sleek. And the original *ALIEN* film claimed blue-collar industrial as its turf. Where is a production designer to go for a new "take" on space travel? For Dobrowolski, the answer was science itself. By consulting scientists and engineers

Tunney and Robert Forster as Capt. A. J. Marley amid the *Nightingale's* stasis chambers for long voyages.



at Northrup-Grumman, IBM, with Intel, he developed a plausible vision of space travel in the 22nd century

"From the very beginning I was trying to create a world that is believable," said Dobrowolski. "I told the entire crew, forget about whatever you have done on sci-fi pictures before."

Dobrowolski's design of the film's deep space medieval vessel, the Nightingale 229, reflects a minimalist, modular approach. Crew modules rotate around a central axis to provide gravity, windows are kept to a minimum, and the sci-fi staple of button-encrusted consoles has given way to a three-dimensional voice-activated computer interface.

"The idea was that because we're in space, and everything has to be manufactured in pieces, everything is modular," Dobrowolski explained. "For the design of the interior of the ship, you would recognize elements that are repeated constantly. That's how things will have been built in space. That means you can take the bay, which is now 80 or 90 feet long, and in a way you can cut it in half, and that could still function as a different part of the ship. So having this kind of minimalist approach also gave me a chance to come up with designs which have this minimalist feel, that it's not about hundreds of colors and hun-

James Spader pilots the Nightingale 229 with Wilson Cruz as computer technician Benj Sotomejor (l).



SUPERNOVA

LOU DIAMOND PHILLIPS

The LA BAMBA star on his outer space gig, working with Walter Hill.

By Dale Kutzera

Like most of the SUPERNOVA cast, Lou Diamond Phillips was new to the futuristic sci-fi genre. The star of LA BAMBA, YOUNG GUNS, STAND AND DELIVER, and COURAGE UNDER FIRE, had most recently starred on Broadway in the revival of Rogers and Hammerstein's "The King and I" before returning to film work with THE BIG HIT.

None of that, however, quite prepared him for the set-bound nature of science fiction, where everything from the space vessel Nightingale 229 to a deep-space mining colony were created on sound stages at Raleigh Studios and an LA Airport hangar. "It is very odd to me, because they usually send me off in a desert or forest somewhere," said Phillips. "It really is like coming to an office—all these sets and interiors. Shooting in LA is odd anyway, because you don't get the sleep-away camp feel you do on location where all you do is eat, sleep, and breathe the movie you're making. Here you get off work and go home. It's really difficult to get into that mindset and in this film you have to go there and be part of this world and universe."

Phillips plays Yerzy Penalosa, a middle-aged medical technician whose contact with an alien object brings on a youthful rejuvenation. "He's probably in his mid-40s," Phillips continued. "They grayed my hair up quite a bit. As far as the physical change, it was more in demeanor than



Phillips as Yerzy Penalosa, a middle-aged medical technician whose contact with an alien object brings on a youthful rejuvenation.

anything else. When I first talked to Walter I said, 'Maybe you could give me a paunch and cut the hairline back.' And he said, 'Hmmm no.' He didn't want that much of a change. He wanted it to be fairly subtle—a bit of a slouched shoulder going on. When he's younger, he's more virile and straightforward. A lot of it is in the eyes more than anything else."

Other than gray hair and prosthetic bags under his eyes, no extensive makeup was used to create the old Penalosa. Phillips simply didn't work out prior to shooting the middle-aged scenes, then hit the gym to become young Penalosa. "I was in fairly good shape, so I didn't work out for a while. Then we had ten days between the last time we saw me shirtless as older Yurzi and the time we see younger Yurzi, so I hit the gym with a guy who trained me for COURAGE UNDER FIRE. I dropped five pounds and cut up,

so there was a body difference and a bit of a difference facially. I had the trainer on the set to pump me up before takes."

Phillips had been offered the part of Penalosa prior to director Walter Hill's involvement, but felt his character lacked emotional depth. Hill, working with writer-producer Dan Chuba and writer David Wilson, addressed the concern by creating more involved backstories for each member of the Nightingale crew. Phillips' Penalosa became a man on the verge of starting a family with Robin Tunney's character, Danika Lund. "In a strange way this is a love story for

me," said Phillips. "[Penalosa] is so in love with this woman that everything stems from that. In the very first scene we see him in, he's gotten permission to have children. That is a very human thing for me. It gives me an arc and it wasn't there in any of the previous drafts. If [moviegoers] can't relate to the people up [on the screen] and their needs and wants and desires, then all the special effects in the world mean nothing. I think we've seen that recently where big special effects extravaganzas with no story have a real hard time."

Unlike the gung-ho character Phillips played in COURAGE UNDER FIRE, Penalosa's first interest is self-preservation. "My character is very reactionary. He's the guy saying 'Lets get out of here.' He's just a space medic and has no illusions about being the hero. He's just decided to have a child with this woman and settle down.

ACTOR LOU DIAMOND PHILLIPS

“At one point I’m wrapped around this alien object like it’s my lover and the thought kept coming to me, ‘Boy, I look like a schmuck.’ I’m here hugging this giant bowling pin.”



Production designer Merrick Hill
229. Right: Filming Digital Domain

foot miniature and that so
like a lot, but when you
ooting it with a 150
that starts eating

Phillips and Robin Tunney, lovers on the ship who face extinction from a seemingly benign alien presence. Hill added the blinky lights to the set design.

His life is in order and then the rest of this craziness happens.”

The “craziness” begins when the crew of the Nightingale 229, a kind of deep-space ambulance for several mining operations, responds to a distress message. In a mining installation deep in the core of a rogue-moon, they find the sole survivor, Troy Larson (Peter Facinelli), and a mysterious alien object. The object seems to bring out the best, and worse, in anyone who comes in contact with it. For Phillip’s character, it becomes an addictive fountain of youth. Playing scenes with the object, much of which would be added later in post-production, required a great deal of imagination and trust. “I just show up and they tell me what to do, and I trust them. I’ll commit,” said Phillips. “At one point I’m wrapped around this alien object like it’s my lover and the thought kept occurring to me, ‘Boy I look like a schmuck. I’m here hugging a giant bowling pin.’ They say ‘Things will

glow and will be coming off of it. It will have a life of its own.’ Yeah right. What if you run out of money? Then I’m stuck holding a lava lamp.”

Actress Robin Tunney found the scene equally disconcerting. “In the scene with Lou, where he is attached to the alien object, I had to have a big reaction and talk him away from it,” said Tunney. “And I kept looking at it and thinking it was a big phallic symbol. How do I really get upset about this and add the ten-

Peter Facinelli as Troy Larson, the moon colony’s sole survivor, bonding with the alien artifact. Right: Phillips love scene with the “lava lamp.”



sion?” Tunney settled on an acting technique called replacing where a familiar incident or emotion is substituted for the unfamiliar scene in the script. “You replace it and say, ‘Okay, how would I react if someone I was in love with had their hand stuck in a lawn mower?’ I had to do a lot of replacing which was challenging.”

Phillips’ biggest problem on SUPERNOVA was having too much time on his hands. “It was the biggest budget I have ever been involved with,” he said. “Because of that there was a lot of stuff that was geared towards waiting for the effects and waiting for the lighting because the lighting had to be just perfect for certain visual effects. There were times when they had to rebuild the set because if you turn around and are looking at a different angle they had to reconfigure the wall. For me as an actor it was about staying focused and excited in a very languorous process. We’d literally come in and do half a scene, not even a full scene, just three or four lines that entire day, so you can get lazy. You sit around, you watch a little TV, you read stuff, and you chat with the crew and the actors. You can be lulled into this pace, that’s very

dangerous when the film itself is supposed to be this psychological, frightening, very intense process. I often had to kick myself in the ass and say ‘Focus! Get your shit together and really attack this scene.’”

Having had some experience in the saddle with the YOUNG GUNS films, Phillips finds a clear relationship between the westerns and science fiction. “A lot of people say science fiction films are the new westerns. The reason I love stories like this is that it is moralistic. The best science fiction is a lesson that gives us big ideas and philosophies in a bigger than life setting. That’s what westerns did. There was good, there was evil. And Walter has given this a certain sense of mythology and epic scale, because it is the fountain of youth. The whole film starts with six people who have been stationed in the Sahara or the Arctic. Six months doing nothing, just hanging out waiting for a distress call. Then one comes and all hell breaks



loose. So it is a lot about loneliness and how people bond and how their environment is so sterile and cold and how they react to that. Do they go within themselves or do they go without and bond with others. Wilson [Cruz, who plays technician Benj Sotomejor] bonds with a computer. I have a lot of sex with Robin Tunney, which is not a bad gig.” □



Angela Bassett uses space age waldo technology to examine the alien artifact that threatens the ship.

dreds of details but it's about those few necessary colors and few necessary details that will distinguish each location from another."

Dobrowolski took a page from his high-tech consultants and designed the Nightingale on a CAD system. The work served the added benefit of providing digital information later used by the special effects company Digital Domain to create the film's visual effects. Dobrowolski's early work coincided with revisions to the script and often served to inform the film's producers and studio executives as to the visual direction the film was heading.

While the film's designs are based on established scientific knowledge—such as the Nightingale's rotating living quarters to provide artificial gravity—the film also adopted a retro look reminiscent of sci-fi films of the '50s. The look extends to the retro uniforms designed by Bob Ringwood.

"Bob did the BATMAN movies and ALIEN RESURRECTION. He has also done a lot of operas and stage work and he got it immediately and designed things that were different from the past," said Chuba. "People who are out in space are going to be fit and he made tight-fitting spandex uniforms. The details give it the look of an era that never existed—a 1960s look in the 21st century."

SUPERNOVA

VISUAL EFFECTS

Supervisor Mark Stetson and Ron Gress on realizing Hill's

By Dale Kutzera

SUPERNOVA presented to the artists and technicians of Digital Domain the challenges of realizing the spaceship where much of the action takes place; creating a mysterious and powerful alien entity; and visualizing one of the universe's great cataclysmic events, the supernova explosion of a blue giant sun.

Digital Domain began work on SUPERNOVA just a few weeks before principal photography began in April of 1998. The first order of business was to design the exterior of the Nightingale 229, a space medical rescue ship. Much of the film takes place in the medical bays, cockpit and crew quarters on the ship, which rotate to recreate an artificial gravity. The long, slender design is reminiscent of the Jupiter explorer in 2001 or the Leonov from 2010, a film supervisor Mark Stetson worked on. Built by miniature effects supervisor Scott Schneider and his crew, The Nightingale transcends the bumpy, kit-bashed look popularized by the STAR



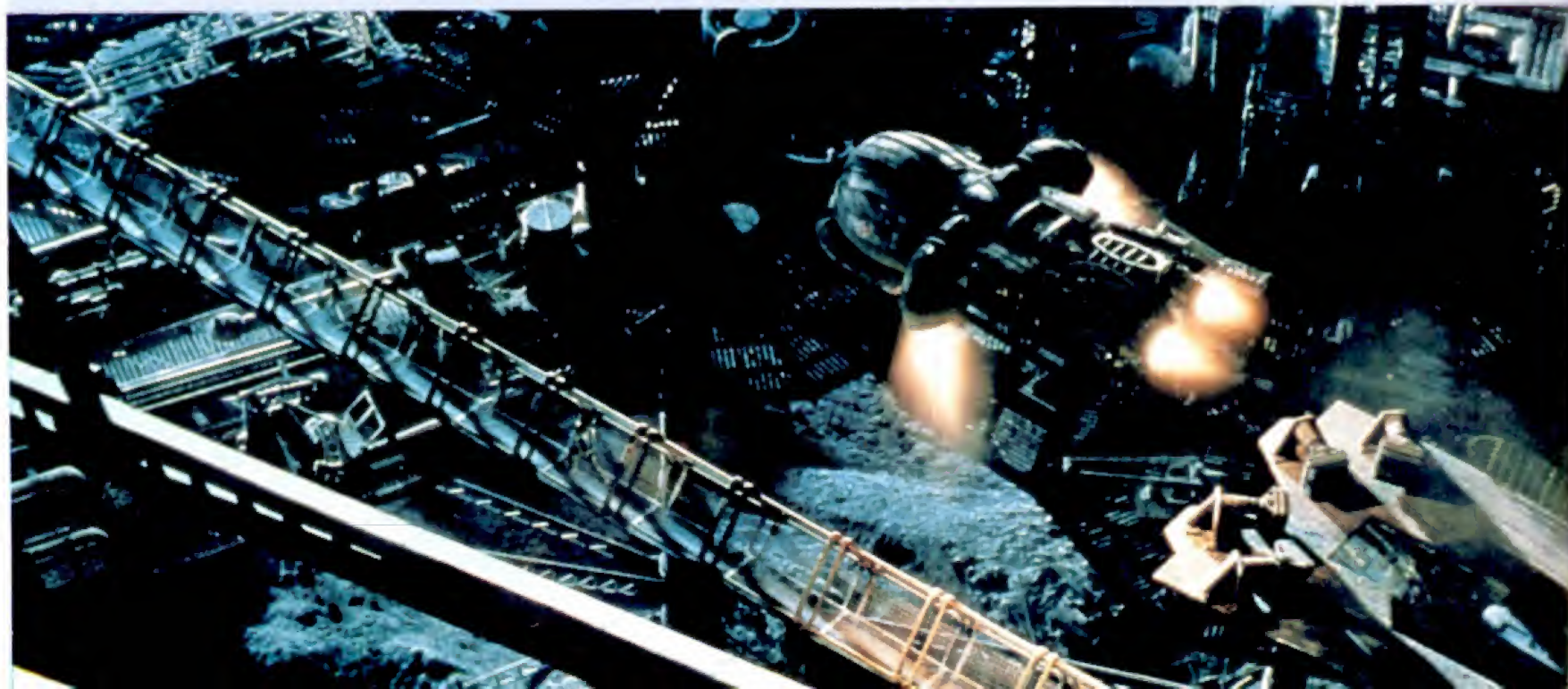
Digital Domain visual effects supervisor Mark Stetson, giving the effects Walter Hill's edgier, long-lensed, hand-held look.

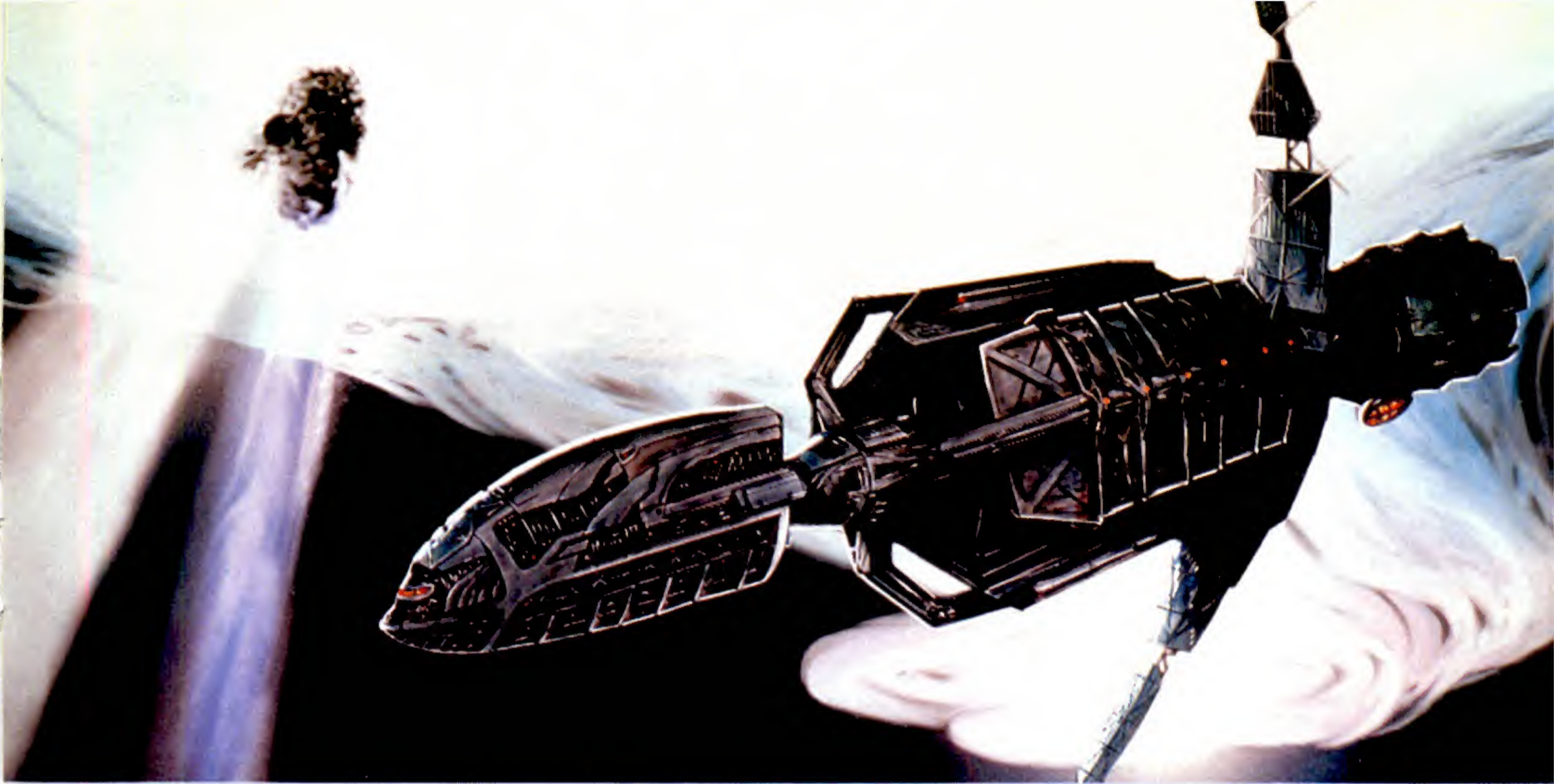
WARS films. Meticulously painted to look like aged metal, the Nightingale comes complete with sliding metal shields to protect the cockpit (a computer effect reminiscent of the Batmobile's defenses), a SILENT RUNNING style observation dome, and wing-like solar panels. "I think the final outcome of the ship," said visual effects art director Ron Gress, "is the best incarnation of a spaceship I've ever seen."

The highly detailed model is over 20 feet in length. The un-

of my mind I'm thinking, 'Well, there goes the small miniature, now we need a big one.'"

Walter Hill wanted to avoid the stately, carefully composed look of most science fiction films, and strive for a rougher, edgier look through the use of long-lens photography and hand-held cameras. It was Stetson's task to match the look cinematographer Lloyd Ahern was achieving on the sets. "The camera is always moving, with a very hand-held feel to it," said Stetson. "We have a couple of huge wide master shots that violate the look, but generally speaking we are pretty tight. We had a 150 foot stage and a 20-





Production designer Merrick Dabrowski's concept art of the Nightingale 229. Right: Filming Digital Domain's large 20 foot model with motion control.

foot miniature and that sounds like a lot, but when you start shooting it with a 150 [mm lens] that starts eating up a lot of stage real fast."

Longer lenses also reduced the depth of field in each shot, and threatened to throw part of the miniature out of focus, which would immediately reveal that the ship is a model. To increase depth of field, and photograph the entire model in focus, special lenses capable of shooting at f-33 were used. Depth of field was further increased by extending the exposure time of each frame of film during each motion-controlled pass. As a last resort, some master shots of the Nightingale were created using a CGI model of the ship.

As Stetson recalled, the use of computers in the creation of both practical and virtual models of the Nightingale was a symbiotic process. "You go back and forth between CG and the physical world. The model started out as sketches and drawings and went into CAD development and then into the Maya animation package. Maya gave us the opportunity to look at the ship with various lenses and we could address the design proportions of the ship to suit the long lens look of the film. We exported that design from Maya back to AutoCad to do some more formal drawings and revisions, then incorporated them back into Maya for another round of proportional analysis. Finally, we made a production illustration of the



ship and then went into construction from there."

At any stage, Hill could make comments on print outs from Maya or AutoCad. The CAD designs of the ship were then used by Schneider and his staff to construct the physical model. In some cases, the digital information was imported into a laser cutter to mass produce the finely detailed components of the vessel. "The AutoCad drawings were then imported into Lightwave where the CG model was constructed," Stetson added. "Then the miniature was finished and photographed, and the photographs were then texture-mapped onto the Lightwave model of the ship. So it is this incredible zig-zag back and forth between CG and the model ship."

Computers were also cleverly employed in the motion control photography of the model. Where traditional motion-control involves repeat computer-controlled passes over the model to record various photographic elements (beauty lighting, practical lighting, mattes, etc.), the Digital Domain staff employed computer animation software to create low-resolution "pre-visualization" versions of each shot. "Some of our pre-vis is suitable for Saturday morning TV," said Stetson. "The great thing about it is you can birth a shot with a life that will carry through to completion. Say it is a model-shot over a planet with volcanoes and stars and everything you need in a shot. You can start it early in the stage of animation and create

Digital Domain visual effects art director Ron Gress with his designs for the film. Left: The Nightingale shuttle approaches the Titan 37 mining colony.



the CG elements for the shot or animate the ship in the case of a CG ship, and essentially that shot will directly evolve through all its iterations into the finished shot. When that path diverts to the stage, it still comes back into the computer for finishing."

A "pre-vis" animation of the *Nightingale* cruising by can be reviewed, critiqued, adjusted, and finally approved. The digital information from that shot can then be interpolated and used by the animation staff to create the various elements of the shot—stars, planets, sun, etc.—and can

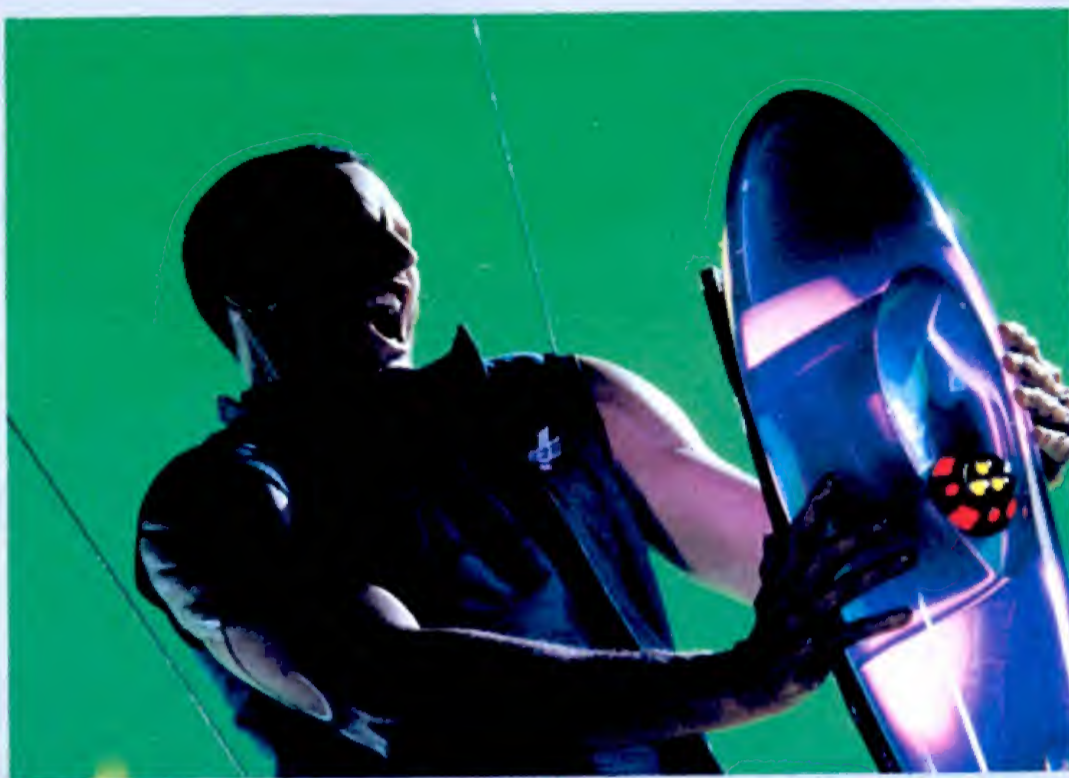


even be used to guide the motion control camera on the sound stage to exactly replicate the composition and movement in the animation. By creating a digital version of its sound stage, motion-control rig, and the *Nightingale* model on its supporting armature, Digital Domain's motion control operators could plan each camera move on computer.

The low-res animations were also provided to editor Freeman Davies who could include them into rough cuts of the film, replacing the traditional "shot missing" slates that typically indicated missing effects shots. "That's the beauty of pre-vis," said Stetson. "Besides allowing us to have a blueprint for our own work, it [gave director] Walter [Hill] something to cut into his film. Freeman Davies can cut our shots into the film as pre-vis and then as we incrementally improve them, they become better and better mid-res ver-

VISUAL F/X SUPERVISOR MARK STETSON

"Our internal tracking software was revolutionary when created three years ago and remains state of the art. Nevertheless, we had to invent new tricks for tracking on this show."



Filming Peter Facinelli green screen with the unenhanced alien object. Below: Digital Domain's artifact effects. Left: The mind-blowing supernova finale.



sions of shots until all the elements are there and they are happy with every aspect of it. Then we up-res it and put it to film. We end up developing sequences much faster that cut into the film and look like part of the film. It solves problems of camera angles, screen direction, and speed and animation characteristics. The sooner you can develop a shot, the sooner you can answer those questions and pre-vis is the best way we've found to do that."

For the mysterious alien entity that wrecks havoc with the *Nightingale* crew, Stetson was presented with the challenge of making a torpedo-shaped prop look otherworldly. "This was a very tightly controlled budget,"

said Stetson, "and there was some discussion in the beginning that the alien object could live by itself without any effect added to it at all. As soon as I saw Walter and his actors working with the prop, I realized that given the power the object exerts on people around it, something more than a nicely executed polyester prop was needed."

As a result, every time the object is seen, some degree of effect was added. "The object reacts to human bio-presence," explained Ron Gress. "It becomes a very seductive object. The whole reason was to make you want to keep that object with you at all times and take it home. We first started talk-

ing about what effect would happen, like sparks shooting out, but Mark's idea was for a magnetic flux that distorts stuff around the object and could reach out and suck you in. The exterior manifestation is a really interesting warping effect, like heat ripples. Sometimes it's idling and sometimes its in full seduce mode. Then inside this thing we are adding ripples and odd alien-looking lights."

The challenge was not in the distortion and light effects themselves, which were created by various computer graphic filters and supervised by Markus Kurtz, but the tracking of these effects over the object. "The tracking of hand-held photography is, of course, an area of a lot of development in visual effects these days, and Digital Domain has been at the forefront of that for quite some time," Stetson explained. "We have our own internal tracking software that was revolutionary when created three years ago and still remains state of the art. Nevertheless, we had to invent a few new tricks for tracking on this show, mostly in response to the long lens."

The climax of *SUPERNOVA* is, in the best B-movie fashion, a race against the clock. The crew of the *Nightingale* must overcome an alien-altered crewman and escape before the blue giant star explodes. The apocalyptic event hangs over the heads of the *Nightingale* crew like the sword of Damocles for much of the film. When Walter Hill left the film, he and editor Freeman Davies were still fine-tuning the sequence of events and the exact relationship between the alien object and this cataclysmic supernova.

To visualize the dramatic currents of gasses and material as a neutron star siphons energy from the neighboring blue giant, Gress drew upon recent images from the Hubble Space Telescope for inspiration. "It was a huge job just making the neutron star and the blue giant, because it isn't just a big ten K out there," said Gress. "It is a character that is going to change radically through the movie." □

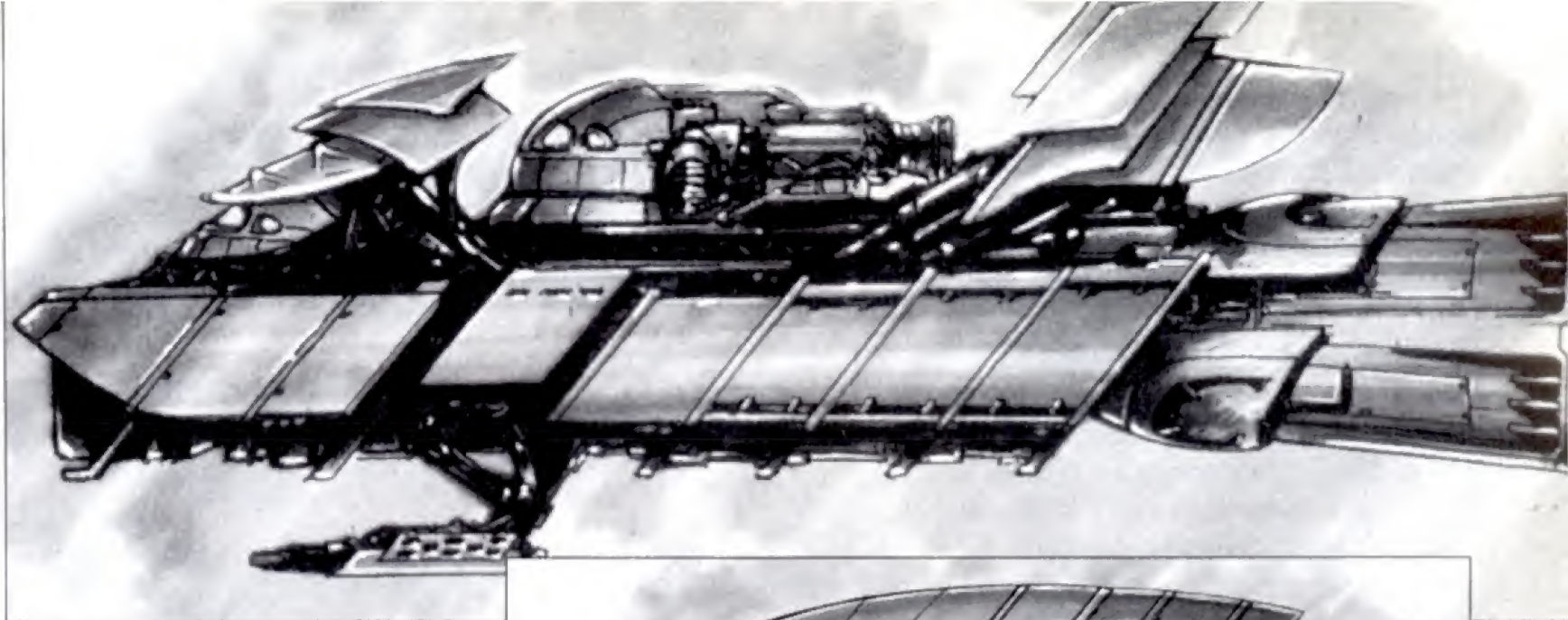
The start of principal photography on April 13, 1998, was set based on the looming possibility of an actors strike in June. In the winter of 1998, films across Los Angeles were racing to begin principal photography so that they could be completed prior to such a strike, just in case negotiations between the union and producers failed. Then, five weeks prior to the start of shooting, Geoffrey Wright left the film due to creative differences with the studio. "We like his sensibility," said Chuba, "but suffice to say, at the end of the day, his vision of the film was not the version the studio wanted to do. He was very aggressive about the way he wanted to shoot it. Some were practical impossibilities such as shooting the whole movie in zero gravity."

With a scant five weeks before principal photography was to begin, the film was once again in crisis. Delays would be prohibitively costly, sets were already under construction, and the back end of the shoot was already up against the potential actors strike. Once again, however, fate smiled on the film in the form of MGM executive Jeff Kleeman. "Jeff deserves credit for putting a coalition together to get Walter Hill," said Chuba. "He got us all to agree to that, and see the merits. Otherwise, it could have gone down in flames."

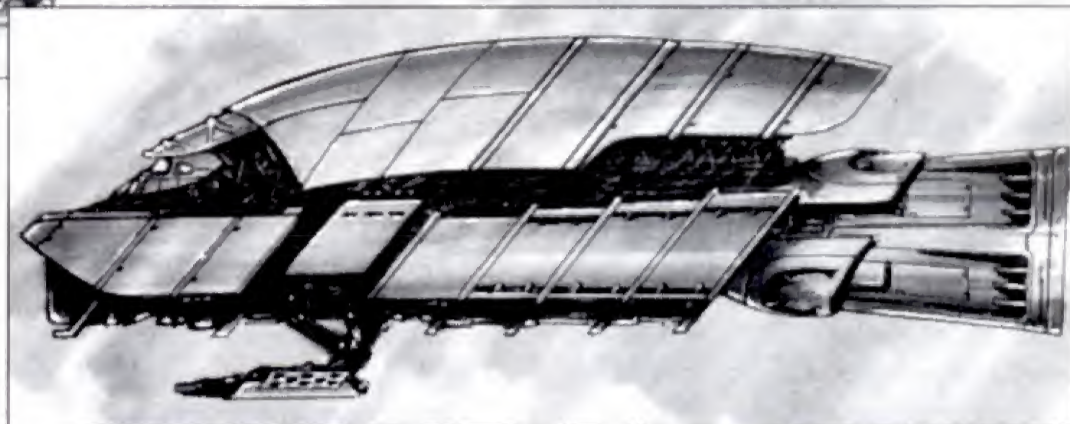
"It was kind of unusual," said Hill, the veteran director. "Very



simply, they called me and I read the script. Obviously, I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't liked the story, but at the same time I felt the story should be told in a really different way. So I gave them my version of it and said if we could do that then I would be willing. Frank Mancuso and I have done a number of films together and I like Frank. He's a very honorable guy and they



The Nightingale 229, complete with sliding metal shields for the ship's shuttle, production designs by conceived by Merrick Dabrowski.



were kind of in a pickle on this situation. I guess the reason I really wanted to do it, at the core, was it reminded me very much of the kind of science fiction that I used to read as a kid and the science fiction movies that I used to see. I think it's kind of an update of the '50s style of science fiction movies. It certainly isn't gadget driven or effects driven, though we have our share of things."

Among the "things" will be film's model work and computer generated imagery by Digital Domain, supervised by Mark Stetson (see article on page 40), and special makeup effect designed by Patrick Tatopoulos, creator of GODZILLA (see article on page 46).

Tatopoulos started on the project with the initial director, Geoffrey Wright. His designs for the various special makeup sequences, in particular the radical transformation of the character Troy by the alien entity, reflected the Australian director's unique visual sensibility. When Wright left the pro-

ject, Tatopoulos set out to meet the very different expectations of director Walter Hill.

"I knew him from his work, but not personally," said Tatopoulos of Hill in an energetic French accent. "The first time I met him, I showed up with my concepts for Geoffrey and I stepped into the room and right then I could tell what I did before wouldn't be right for Walter. I don't know why. It was a weird vibe. It struck me within 30 seconds, this is not going to work here. Geoffrey is a young, long-hair, rebel kind of guy. Walter has all this experience in the business. He's a different character altogether and part of my work as a designer is understanding the director. I'm not saying I'm achieving that, but I think it's very important to try to capture the person."

Under Hill's direction, SUPERNOVA became more a psychological thriller than a straight

monster film like ALIEN, or an exercise in blood and gore like another recent close-encounter film EVENT HORIZON. In keeping with the film's targeted PG-13 rating, the emphasis would be on the twisted and grotesque rather than the bloody.

Noted Digital Domain visual effects art director, Ron Gress, "You always look for a chance to do something that hasn't been done before or at least greatly improve on something that has been done before. There are only so many things spaceships can do, but here was an opportunity to design a totally new ship and totally new look for what that ship does. Where this ship spends most of its time is a place that no one has ever seen on screen before, so for me this was an opportunity to delve deeper into the phenomena of neutron stars and blue giant stars."

Digital Domain had to redesign the Nightingale 229 when director Walter Hill wanted more locations to spread out the action, and a third module of a cargo bay was created. The interior sets, designed by Marek Dabrowski, were already under construction, and provided the basis for the exterior design. "They had already come up with a rotating module concept," said visual effects supervisor Mark Stetson, "and Walter immediately needed more room to play the story out, so that changed the design of the ship."

Hill and Chuba worked together on the script, drafting copious notes for writer David Wil-

Nightingale Captian Marley (Robert Forster) has a ghastly stasis tube malfunction, makeup concept by Patrick Tatopoulos. Left: Tube design.



SUPERNOVA

PRODUCTION DESIGN

Conceptualist Merrick Dabrowski on visualizing science fiction worlds.

By Dale Kutzera

son to consider. "Walter came on with just five weeks and managed to put his own spin on it," said Chuba. "He grasped the potential for telling a retro sci-fi story. He and I sat down and worked on the script together. There were a tremendous number of notes and we handed them off to David Wilson who tirelessly and enthusiastically took our new direction and did another draft of the script with five weeks to go. He's one of the fastest writers out there. Another writer, Kathy Rabin, did a polish on the character stuff while David continued to work on the bigger action beats. We kept David on and he kept working on the changes Walter wanted while shooting continued."

Hill's changes were primarily on a character level, creating backstories for each character and selecting a central character for the audience to relate to. "In one sense, the story would have been perfectly fine for somebody else, but it wasn't the way I would choose to tell the tale," said Hill. "The way they had set it up before, most of the key players in the cast knew about the backstory and therefore it was being explained to the audience. It seems to me all they did was sit around and talk about it. I said in one of the meetings, 'I don't want to make a move about what happened ten years ago.' I

Wilson Cruz and James Spader on the *Nightingale*, designed by Merrick Dabrowski as a "floating prison."



For the subterranean mining operations, production designer Merrick Dabrowski turned to astronomer Jacklyn Green, head of the Extraterrestrial Materials Simulation Laboratory at the Pasadena-based Jet Propulsion Laboratory. The celestial body on which the mining colony was set changed during rewrites. Green, whose research concerns comets, not surprisingly suggested one for the setting, but long after filming on the set wrapped, the producers changed the location to a rogue moon to distance the film from such comet/asteroid films as *DEEP IMPACT* and *ARMAGEDDON*.

"Comets are the leftover building blocks from the formation of the solar system," said Green. "They are a natural source of valuables out in space. They're rich store houses of hydrocarbons, little bits of minerals, and also water. And if you have a propulsion system you can mine that water and then break it up into the component hydrogen and oxygen and use that for your rocket fuel. So they liked the idea of having the salvage operation be on a comet and we went forward with it."

The trouble is no one really knows what a comet looks like. "The really mysterious thing is that we have only one picture of a comet nucleus," continued Green. "That was taken in 1986 by a space craft called Giotto from the European space agency. They put a photo mosaic together and we learned that comets are very rough, very black objects. We took our



Peter Facinelli on Dabrowski's medical ship the *Nightingale* 229, one of only two settings used as a backdrop for the story.

knowledge about that picture, about how our solar system formed, and all the various research and studies that say that comets are put together bit by bit, and come up with this set."

"Jackie showed me research of photographs of existing comet dust and diagrams of the comet structure," said Dabrowski. "The whole principle of the comet is based on the fractal concept: its structure doesn't change no matter how close or far away you are. From that, I came up with a design which has blobs that are connected together, and because we have those huge machines that drill, and you have the surface which is flat, and it's a cross-section of those blobs in different sizes."

Unlike the repeating modular design of the *Nightingale*, the mining cavern was purely organic. Picture a cavern 200

feet long, 140 feet wide and 40 feet tall, whose walls appear to be made from frozen basketballs. And cold? Green estimates that the temperature 300 meters beneath the surface of a comet would hover around a balmy 150 degrees Kelvin—this being the equivalent of several hundred degrees Fahrenheit below zero.

The setting proved so enticing to Green that she couldn't resist bringing a prototype of a real spacecraft to the set for a photo session. The real spacecraft, called *Deep Space Four* is set to launch in 2003 and land on a comet nucleus in December of 2005.

"*Deep Space Four* is the first mission that will ever land on the surface of the comet," Green explained.

"We're gonna drill into it and get samples and analyze them right there and do in-situ science, then we're gonna get a sample and bring it back to earth. So we've got a number of firsts: first landing, first anchoring and drilling, first return. The comet is called Temple One. It's what we call a short period comet. Every so often one of these comets coming in for the first time gets too close to Jupiter. Its orbit gets disturbed and it gets kicked into the short period orbit, which has its greatest distance from the Sun of five astronomical units roughly. An astronomical unit is the distance between the Earth and the Sun. That family of short period comets are the ones that we send our missions to, because their orbits are very predictable."

To realize the set (built on a

MERRICK DABROWLOWSKI

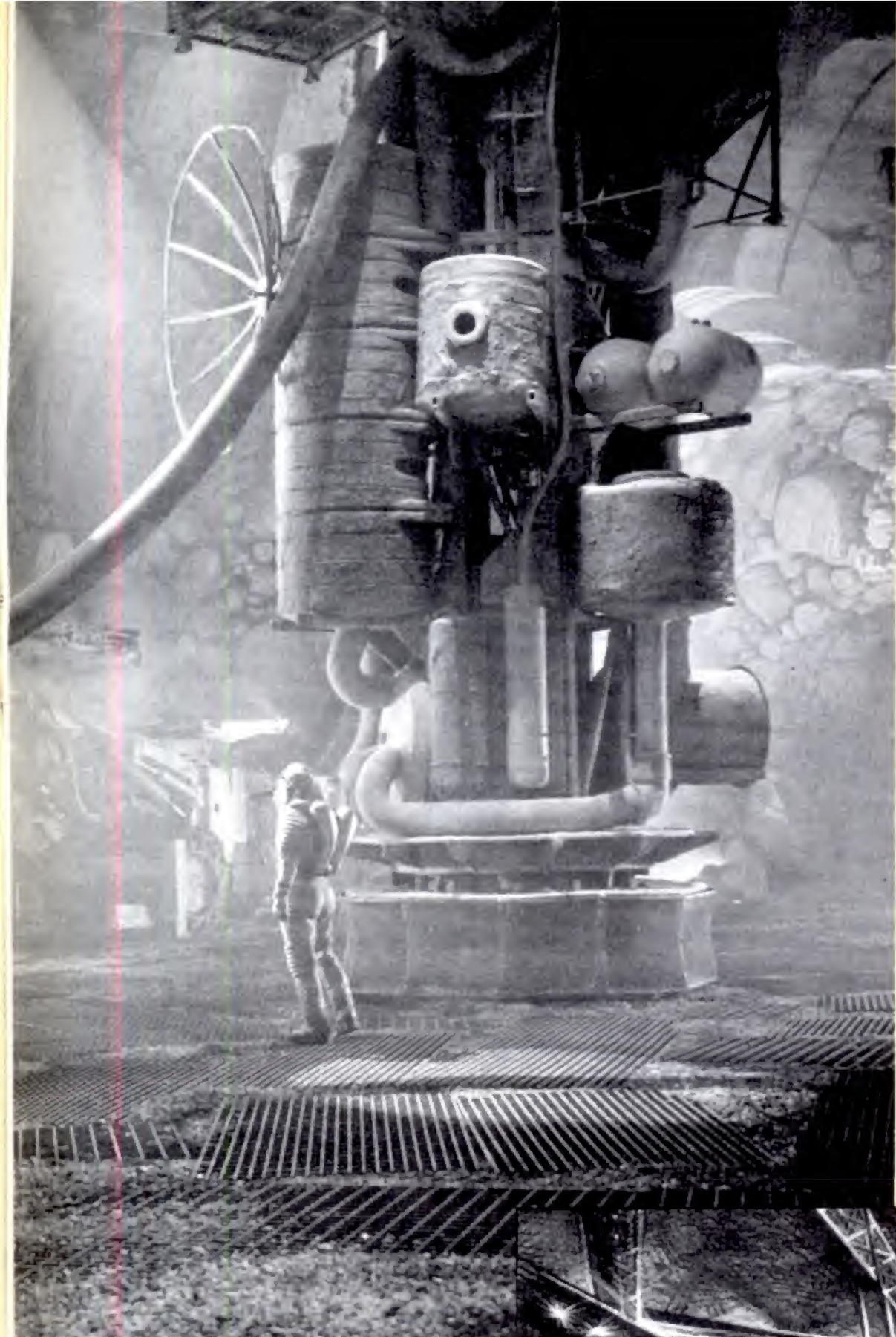
“The bigger drama is the drama based on fact. This is not a fantasy-driven script, it’s based on reality, and the more real it is, the stronger the conflict, the stronger the drama.”

ed from those blocks.”

“There are two worlds I’m trying to show,” said Dabrowski. “One is the world of this mining facility, which is more in the style of retro sci-fi. Because we’re mining for very basic elements like water, we don’t need very sophisticated equipment. We can work with basic equipment that, in a way, we could find on Earth. When it’s transported up in space, it doesn’t matter how big it is or how heavy it is, because it’s a very low gravity situation. So everything’s heavy and bulky and very primitive in a way. It doesn’t really have any aesthetic reasons of existing, just a function. So that was one concept of using low-tech, sci-fi kind of references.

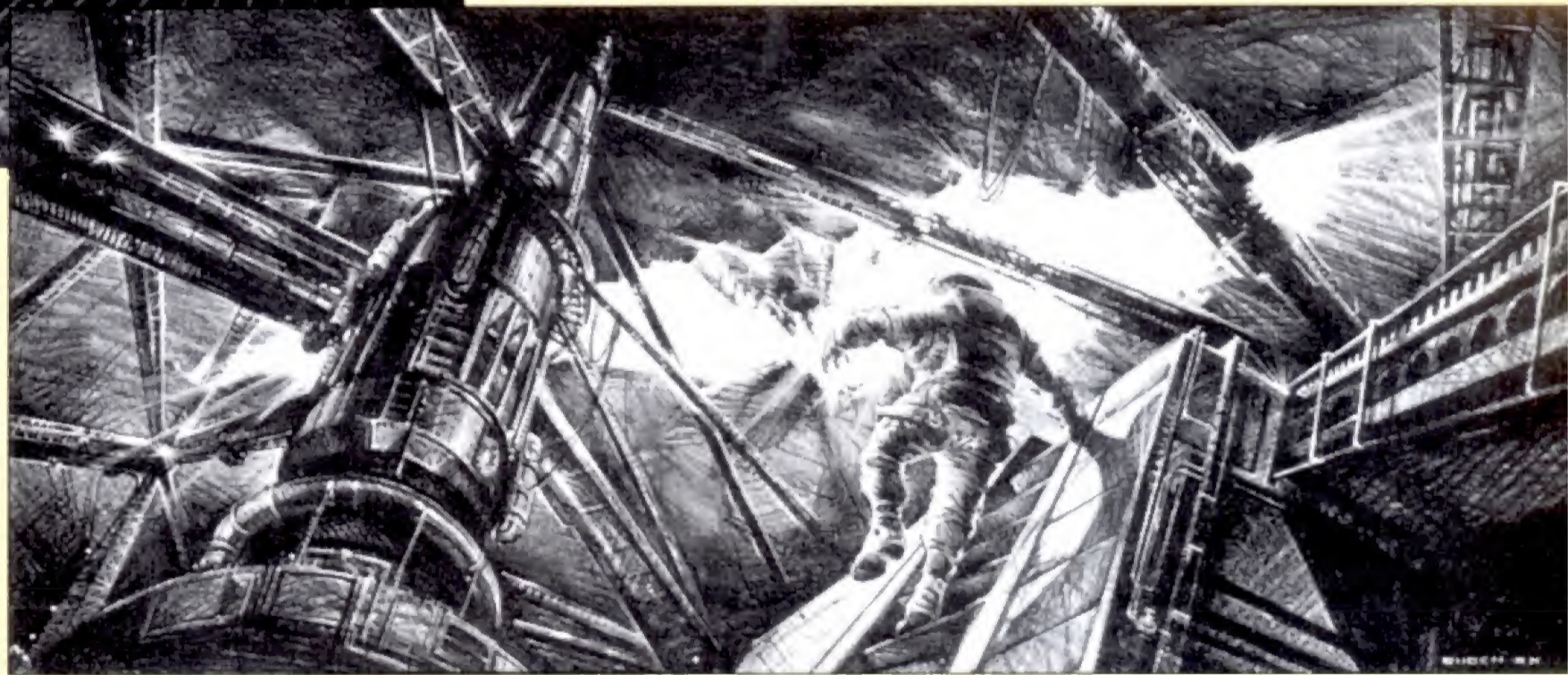
“Then the other ship is the

Nightingale, which is the only other place where we see human beings. They never land, so this is like a floating prison in a way. We did some research, but not the Mir and the Saturn ships and we were trying to stay away from the sci-fi world, simply because I really believe that sci-fi went in the direction of pure entertainment and less fact. And the bigger drama, I believe, is the drama that is based on fact. This is not a fantasy-driven script, it is based on reality, and the more real it is, the stronger this whole conflict is and the stronger drama. The horror that takes place there really affects the crew members and affects the audience. So we have to think what is the reality 150 years from now in space?” □



The mining operation on Titan 37, the film’s only other setting, built in a vacant airplane hangar at Los Angeles International Airport. Right: Dabrowski’s early concept sketches suggested a comet setting for the mines which was changed to a rogue moon after filming wrapped.

vacant airplane hangar at Los Angeles International Airport), Dabrowski had a team of 35 sculptors, working round the clock, carve huge blocks of Styrofoam for the cavern walls. The Styrofoam was sealed with polyurethane, then painted a brownish gray. Finally, the entire setting, including equipment towers and mining tracks, was blasted with salt to simulate the ice crystals. “I didn’t want repetitive elements,” Dabrowski explained. “Sometimes you cast things in fiberglass and repeat them, but we didn’t want that. We wanted this to be like a live sculpture. There are huge blocks of Styrofoam we put on top of each other and we sculpt-



wanted one character to, in essence, not know the back story. It turned out to be the James Spader character, he would experience the back story as the audience does."

For Lou Diamond-Phillips, the new emphasis on character was the key for him to do the film. "I had read this script a couple evolutions ago," said Diamond-Phillips, "and the characters were a bit interchangeable at first and so the story didn't have as much impact. What Walter did that got me on board was go in and make each character an individual. So that if they do die—and people do die in this—you will at least care and feel like you knew them. He's picked the pace up immensely and really given a dramatic dynamic to a lot of the scenes."

"Walter drove the story in a different direction," said Chuba. "For example, in the beginning, we have Robert Forster in the cockpit of the ship, talking about his philosophy of space and being technical and poetic at same time. It's a long speech and we're cross-dissolving that with a star field and a massive space environment. It's very colorful and it is a moment from the '50s or '60s, made with today's technology. We give that scene time to play out and it's magic. And that came from Walter." □

Peter Facinelli holds the crew at bay in the suspenseful climax as a nearby blue giant star goes supernova.



SUPERNOVA

MAKE-UP EFFECTS

Designer Patrick Tatopoulos on shock effects and alien transformations.

By Dale Kutzera

SUPERNOVA presented makeup and creature effects expert Patrick Tatopoulos a welcome change from his previous job, that of designing a giant lizard that would terrorize New York. Although set in the distant future, and in a far off corner of space, SUPERNOVA offered an opportunity for more human scaled makeup effects.

One effect, for example reveals the horrific influence of the alien entity's seductive powers. What at first is an invigorating fountain of youth, ultimately causes a character to regress into a quasi-fetal state. "The situation is that this alien energy starts changing the body and in the final stage he regresses so much that he starts looking like a fetus," explained Tatopoulos. "It was a twisted thing—a baby face, but old at the same time. We used a full head appliance, hand appliances, and the rest of the body was dressed so we didn't see much. We wanted the guy to stay basically the same size. We made the suit look a little bigger for that scene so it looked like he shrunk a little bit, but not too much. We use silicone for that purpose. It had a lot of layers and transparency. His eyes were all puffy and black. It looks very disturbing. [The actor] could see a little through the eyes, but barely. That was my favorite design and it was shot beautifully."

To show the alien object's rejuvenating affects on the character of Yerzy, played by Lou Diamond Phillips, Tatopoulos proposed a variety of techniques, including the use of two actors—



Tatopoulos works on his alien design for INDEPENDENCE DAY. His creature effect finale for SUPERNOVA was dropped by the producers.

one young, one old—and computer animated morphing. "It started getting out of hand, and Walter said 'Let's age [the actor] before.' We couldn't call it an all-age, but an aged-down on Yerzy—baggy eyes and gray hair and also a slightly more grayish tone of skin. The day he appears younger, we lose the baggy eyes, give him a fresher tan, keep his very dark hair and put him in tighter clothing so we realize he's got muscles and is more powerful. From the beginning of the movie to that point he needs makeup, but it was a simple makeup, didn't take very long, and was cost-effective." Tatopoulos' designs were applied on set by makeup artists Jake Garber and Mike Smithson.

More involved was Yerzy's ultimate fate, quite literally, at the hands of Troy. After a vicious battle in the medical lab of the ship, Troy crushes Yerzy's head between his hands. The shocking scene was filmed from the back of Yerzy's head, using a specially controlled bust of Lou Diamond Phillips. "We did a full replica

of Lou Diamond's head, with special mechanics that allowed us to squeeze the head and put it back into shape," explained Tatopoulos. "The first approach was to make a plastic shell on either side of a silicon head so you could really feel this thing cracking. We found that we would have to run five, maybe ten heads to be safe if they needed to re-shoot it. So instead, we built a mechanical device so the head would deflate and shrivel. It was a silicone head skin and a skull of fiberglass

mounted on springs. We made the skin thick so it retains [Yerzy's] identity. We wanted to feel the thickness of the flesh and muscle of the human face."

The mechanical head allowed for repeated crushings. By shooting the scene from the back, there was no need for additional bloodletting. "We show it slightly from the three-quarter angle," said Tatopoulos. "But it is disturbing enough. The sound will also help. We have blood in the movie, but it is a reasonable amount. We aren't splattering the entire spacecraft with it."

A similar restraint was used in another gruesome effect. When leaping from one corner of space to another via dimension folding engines, the Nightingale crew reside in protective stasis tubes. When one tube fails to seal properly, the unfortunate occupant is merged with the glass and metal into a horrifying, and still living, victim. "That is a very grotesque effect," said Tatopoulos. "Because we're not doing a monster movie per se, or pure makeup effects movie, we had to be not too crazy on the budget. So when we



Robert Forster as Captain Marley, discovered still alive by Angela Bassett (r) after his stasis tube malfunctions during a dimension-folding leap in space.

go extremely close to him, it was a makeup appliance. Then we could pull away from him and used a hyper-realistic head which came out really good. We built a dummy head with a very simple puppeteering device to make it move enough to get the point."

The use of the puppet head also prevented keeping the actor in makeup any longer than necessary. Tatopoulos noted that much of the scene's impact derives not from the makeup, but from the reaction of the crew members as they witness the death of their friend. "There are good actors in the movie. [Angela] Bassett and [James] Spader and everyone else reacting in front of the tube as this guy is dying, and seeing his face in there gives you as much as you need. We get the point. The effect where the stasis tube starts opening and the guy is obviously stuck to the back of the tube is another freaky thing. You don't completely see it, but he is spreading and being torn apart. This effect was a full body puppet that could spread apart when the tube opens and then basically bursts apart. Talking with Walter, we decided not to have a bloody effect, but more smoke and steam and tendrils flying everywhere as his body spreads between both parts of the stasis tube."

The most complex character to realize was that of Troy, who, over the course of the film, is transformed by the alien object. Tatopoulos' original design for Geoffrey Wright involved a more ethereal alien pres-

ence that would have been primarily computer generated. Walter Hill wanted a more twisted, grotesque version of the character played by Peter Facinelli. "We did not have much time and I had to do every phase of his transformation," said Tatopoulos. "I started to design the final stage of the character just to see how far we were going to go. Then it is easier to just go back and design what is happening between his real look and the final stage. Also before you have an actor, it is okay to work on the final stage where the thing is really twisted and turned into something really different."

Three stages were designed. The first was Facinelli without special makeup. Then a secondary, partial transformation in which the alien entity is beginning to twist and contort his body. The third and final incarnation involved a full body suit and head makeup on Facinelli to reflect the completely twisted affect. Between each stage,

The alien entity causes one character to revert to a quasi-fetal state, "a baby face" said Tatopoulos, "but old at the same time."



PATRICK TATOPOULOS

"It is very interesting for someone like me, who does so many monsters and creatures, to do something more subtle once in a while... We didn't go overboard and that is cool."

Troy would briefly contort, as though his twisted self were trying to burst through his skin. "What I did was sculpt two and three," said Tatopoulos, "and in-between the CGI guys would scan [the second stage makeup] and basically make it appear through the skin of the



character. It would come and go—a weird thing happening all the time—up to a point where stage two was basically set for a scene or two. Then he goes back to himself, and then he goes back to two and even further."

Tatopoulos and Hill were both concerned that the erratic transformation might confuse viewers and wanted to ensure that the alien object's affect on Troy was comprehensible. "Up to a point the issue was the difficulty of making the public understand what was going on," explained Tatopoulos. "He would go back and forth all the time, then he reaches the final stage and stays there, why? It was a story issue that Walter was developing through the process. He wanted to make sure people knew what was going on and that it made sense."

The presentation of Troy's change was further complicated by budget considerations. "We were cutting the budget here and there, because the CGI and visual effects were getting so involved," said Tatopoulos. "We had to cut some of those morphing in-between

sequences. Once you start cutting those out, the explanation of the progression doesn't make quite as much sense. We had to be careful during the course of filming that this evolution was clear to the public and that they knew this thing was Troy at the end of the film. As twisted as it was, it was still him."

The desire for clarity was one reason the third and most deformed incarnation of Troy was ultimately dropped from the film. "The issue was, do we keep the actor's face or does he turn into more of a creature at the end?" said Tatopoulos. "We made a test on the final stage of Troy and Walter liked it very much, but the

issue when we showed that to the studio, is that they felt it was turning into something way out there. It was still very anthropomorphic. It still looked like a man, but his face was quite twisted and you couldn't recognize the character. So we had to sacrifice the last stage, which for me was the saddest part of the thing, because I knew Walter liked the look of it. We all did. The test was very convincing. As the creature designer it would be nice to have the thing appear in [the movie], but ultimately I know the movie will be what Walter wanted it to be, which is more a psychological and more into character than into shocking effects."

In some respects, the more human scaled challenges of SUPERNOVA are a welcome change of pace from Tatopoulos' more monstrous creations like GODZILLA. "It is very interesting for someone like me, who does so many monsters and creatures, to do something more subtle once in a while. But it is good for us as makeup and creature guys to have something subtle. We didn't go overboard and that is cool." □

STUART LITTLE

John Dykstra and Eric Allard on the amazing mouse effects.

By Mitch Persons

John Dykstra calls himself "a legend in my own mind," but he is so much more than that. He is to CGI effects what D.W. Griffith was to the entire motion picture industry. Dykstra is the man who virtually created the sophisticated camera system for *STAR WARS*, the film that forever changed the course of special effects in the movie industry. He is the co-founder (with George Lucas and Gary Kurtz) of Industrial Light and Magic, the company that oversaw the dynamics of such films as *JUMANJI*, *TWISTER*, and *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?* Dykstra was also involved in *STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE*, *BATMAN FOREVER*, *BATMAN AND ROBIN*, and scores of other films, TV shows, and commercials, and the winner of an Academy Award. Now this unassuming, gentlemanly innovator is the senior visual effects supervisor and second unit director for *STUART LITTLE*.

"In *STUART LITTLE*," said Dykstra, "we have a combination of mechanical and visual effects. There's water running in sinks, water running in the streets, the boat race, those kinds of things which are traditional mechanical effects, the type of effects that Eric Allard is supervising. Then there's matte painting, and



CGI family portrait, Hugh Laurie as Mr. Little, Geena Davis as Mrs. Little, Jonathan Lipnicki as George, holding mouse brother Stuart.

miniature shots, and computer-generated characters, which are traditional visual effects. The distinction between the two is that one tends to be more mechanical, and the other one tends to be photometric, meaning we combine multiple pieces of film to create a final illusion.

"Most recently on films, particularly on films that I have worked on, where we have action material, the mechanical effects and visual effects have to collaborate in order to create the illusion. In the *BATMAN*

films I did, the mechanical effects had to be integrated into the visual effects, because we were blowing our miniatures up, so we had pyrotechnics that exploded, we had very complicated mechanical rigs that were used to actually break the buildings which we were blowing up apart. It was quite a huge overlap of mechanical/visual media, because these shots then became a single element in a film composite that combined with several other pieces of film to create a single scene.

"On *STUART LITTLE*, because Stuart is, in most cases, computer-generated,—virtual, actually—so he can't do things like move a bottle cap, or push water aside, or be bopped by a ball, we rely on Eric and his mechanical effects people to give us the rigs that simulate that. What Eric has accomplished is similar to the work that was done on *ROGER RABBIT*. Everybody knows the characters in *ROGER RABBIT* were animated characters, so they didn't really exist, so when the animated character interacted with a bottle of water, or a chair, or a bicycle, the bicycle, bottle of water, or chair had to be manipulated mechanically, to make it look as though the character was moving it. So it requires some artistry in engineering to do things in a natural way, and tech-



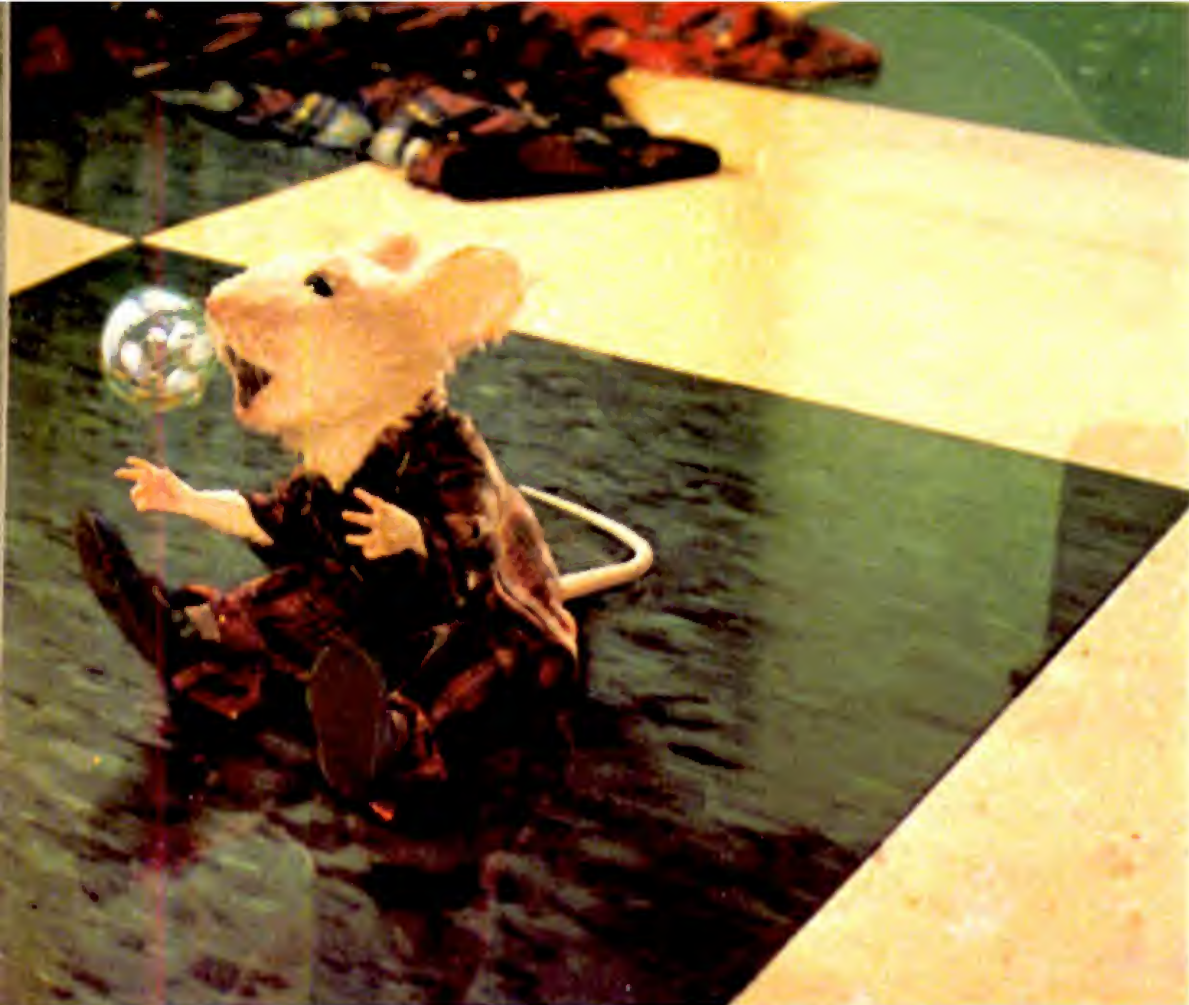
Stuart's landmark CGI character animation is by Sony Imageworks.

nical expertise in terms of trying to figure out how to make this happen with a minimum of visible wire removal, and a maximum of concentration on the animated character. The work we're doing on *STUART LITTLE* requires a very intimate coordination between those two components, because our character Stuart interacts with people on a regular basis, and he's very small. It's very intricate, jewel-like work, and if not done as a cooperative effort, can look extremely tacky and amateurish.

"There's another kind of interesting idea that's involved in the creation of a character or an illusion of the nature that we're making for this film, and that is animatronics. Patrick Tatopoulos, the animatronics supervisor and his crew have built animatronic versions of Stuart. There are times when our CGI Stuart will not be cinematically feasible, and then Patrick will have a hand in creating the look."

A key scene in Columbia/TriStar's *STUART LITTLE* is a wild nautical race between nine model boats, including a schooner named *The Wasp* and a sloop, the *Lillian B. Womrath*. Nothing too unusual there, except that the race takes place in a placid pond in New York's Central Park, and *The Wasp* is helmed by the film's titular character, a mouse.

Eric Allard, the mechanical effects coordinator of *STUART LITTLE*, stands at the foot of the bridge of the pond set at Sony



Stuart takes a bath in the family washing machine (r) and burps a CGI bubble, effects supervised by STAR WARS guru John Dykstra, still on the cutting edge.

“Our character Stuart is very small,” said Allard. “It’s very intricate, jewel-like work, and if not done as a cooperative effort can look tacky and amateurish.”

Studios, looking thoughtfully out over the water. In the past, Allard has, among other accomplishments, created Number Five, the robot from *SHORT CIRCUIT*, and worked on special effects for the films *BRAINSTORM* (starring the late Natalie Wood,) and *FX/2*. Now he is designing and choreographing this boat race, and although there are no vessels in sight, Allard is present this day to get a better grasp of what he and his crew must do in order to make the scene a cogent one.

“Yes, that’s going to work just fine,” Allard said, surveying the set. “This tank we’re shooting in, the one representing the pond, is actually the same tank that was used many years ago in all those Esther Williams musicals. It’s 12 feet deep, and in the middle of it there’s a big pit with an hydraulic lift that used to be the platform that she would emerge out of.

“For *STUART LITTLE*, we

couldn’t go deeper than four feet, because if the pool was any deeper, we would lose our boats. We created a sub-floor in that tank by making metal frames with a metal backing, and then made a complete floor only four feet deep over the 12-foot floor. We then put nine track systems on it. What we have is like nine small railroad tracks that go on top of the deck, and then we have these travelers, which are little bearing wheels in little casings that engage the track, and then cables pull them along. We have pulleys on the inside of every turn of the track, so the boats can actually be seen going around turns. Then we have cable winch systems that pull each one for each individual track. There are wavemakers that are installed to add ripples to the water. The water is dyed with both opaquing pigmentation and color, so that we can achieve a look to the water that

makes it the proper color, as well as performing the job of hiding the rigging. We’ve also got a lot of river fans to simulate tidal winds, and have installed crank shafts with cables to move the branches and leaves on the trees when there are breezes blowing. The sails that we have on the boats, we call them magic sails. They have a piece of spring wire in them on a shaft

by John Dykstra, the second unit director and senior visual effects supervisor. There’s quite a bit of CG action, boats crashing, The Womrath trying to do in *The Wasp*, and Stuart having to react to all of it. We’re going to shoot that part outdoors, and so we won’t have to simulate the wind; we’ll have the real thing. Also, it will not be necessary to have the magic sails.

“From that scene, the boats pass by a buoy and then return to this original set here. I don’t think I’ll be ruining anything by letting people know that Stuart does win the race, and my team will be involved with shooting *The Wasp* coming in victoriously, with *The Womrath* lumbering in behind it, or running aground, or whatever Rob [Minkoff, the director] ends up deciding on. This is the

longest and most expensive segment that we have to shoot. It’s going to take 13 days and cost a whopping \$100,000 an hour.”

Noted Dykstra, “I think part of the fun of any of these kinds of films is the idea for the audience that, in fact, their disbelief is suspended, and they really think that this is a character that they might see coming out of a theater, walking down the street, piloting a skiff. That’s



that, when rotated, creates the look of an inflated sail. The boats themselves, which are exact replicas of real ones, were built from scratch by a team headed by Dennis Schultz, our model shop supervisor.

“Once the boats go under the bridge we cut to a different set, and that becomes more of what we’re calling ‘Stuart-vision,’ kind of Stuart’s point of view of the boat race from the time he goes under the bridge. That part of the film is going to be directed

A Little bedtime story: Lipnicki and Stuart take care of dental hygiene, expressive use of CGI animation from Rob Minkoff, the director of *THE LION KING*.



why we have to be as collaborators, the mechanical effects boys, the animatronics people, the people from visual effects. We have to be in sync in order to make sure that the seams don’t show, that the audience really believes that this puppet and this image is a very real character.

STUART'S TRAINER

Animal trainer Boone Narr on getting the cats to play CGI cat and mouse.

"It's an ironic thing, in a way, that in a picture that deals with the life of a mouse, we were called in to work almost exclusively with cats," said animal stunt coordinator Boone Narr, the man behind the mouse antics in DreamWorks' *MOUSE HUNT*. When *STUART LITTLE* was in the planning stages, Narr was asked if he could get a live mouse to do what was required. "That was obviously out of the question," he said, "because no amount of training is going to get a mouse to talk, swim, or pilot a boat. The only route to go was CGI."

Narr was assisted on the film by Sue Hanson and a cadre of ten cat trainers. "We have to have strength in numbers because on this particular show, the cats have to do so much, and play so much, and have to have such definite character traits that working with them is quite difficult. The kinds of things these cats are asked to do would be difficult enough with dogs, who are supposed to be easier to work with. As an example, there is a scene where

Stuart's showdown with Snowbell, using laser light to direct the cat's eyeline for a mouse that isn't there.



Narr directs the film's heavy, Snowbell, one of 23 cat stars. Right: Choice expression, Snowbell with Stuart's CGI tail dangling from his mouth.

the Mafia gang has to laugh at Snowbell, who the gang, out of total disrespect, calls Doorbell. The cats start laughing at him, and so they fall down on their sides and chuckle, and roll over on their backs, and kick their feet in the air. One guy comes up and puts his feet over a little bucket handle, cocks his head, and giggles like Jack Nicholson in *BATMAN*. The giggle, of course, will be coming out of an animated cat mouth, but the rest of the movement will be live.

"We have 23 cats filling in for the eight parts. If we were trying to do these moves say, 30 years ago, I don't think we would be able to go as far as we have. Fortunately, our modern technology has come up with the laser light, which, as animal trainers, we find invaluable. What we do is, we teach our animals, cats, dogs, pigs, whatever, to follow the light beam. There are many scenes in *STUART LITTLE* in which the cats are supposed to be talking to Stuart, or carrying on with him, or chasing

him. Later on, an animated Stuart is going to be put into the picture, but right now, what is the cat looking at? How do you tell a cat, look left, look up, go and chase something that's not there? That's why we use the



laser light, and that's why we have so many backups. There are some animals that follow the light, some that look at it, some that chase it, some that follow it, and some that just stare at it.

"These cats working together, on stage, with actors, chasing a character that they can't see, is another big challenge. It's a whole new ball game. When people go to see our movie, they'll wonder, 'How in the world did you get those animals to do that?'"

"And there is something else, too, something that nobody in the audience sees. In order to get the fullest cooperation from the animals, you must, absolutely must, have a general level of compassion for them and what you as a trainer are doing. It's not like the grips where you load your equipment in the truck and then get to go home. Sue and I, and all the other trainers who work with us, are at this 24 hours a day. There is literally no other way it can work."

Mitch Persons

In the film, Stuart is given a remote control car by his adopted brother George, calling for more on-set mechanical effects devised by Allard. "In the real world, if you weigh 150 pounds, and you get into a 3000 pound automobile, it moves when you get in," said Allard. "In our movie, when Stuart gets into the car, it has to react to his slight weight. The door has to open, the suspension has to settle a little if he's moving around. All of these things have been built into the remote control car. The shots of Stuart will be performed by John [Dykstra's] CGI Stuart.

"Wherever Stuart is, in order to time into the set, we always try to do something in the live world that will help tie the CGI character into the film. If he's walking on a bed, there have to be footsteps on the bed. If he's putting a book away on a shelf of books, the books have to move. We have a system that we've built where we can do things digitally, so that once getting a particular movement, we can either use airplane servos, or pneumatics, and once we get the proper look, all we have to do is push a button and the props will do the same thing every time.

"We do have something we call RoboStuart, which is a little unfinished body of Stuart that has servos in it, so if he is underneath a piece of clothing, or underneath the covers of the bed, we can make the proper movements. When Stuart has to slide down bed linens, or when he spins a globe of the world, or when he lifts a fork up to his mouth, the RoboStuart can simulate the movements just enough so we will be able to pretty much tell how the completed shot will look."

Physical effects supervisor Eric Allard prepares the boat race sequence, setting up the CGI to work on set.



GEENA DAVIS

A different kind of kiss goodnight from action star turned loving mom.

Dykstra emphasized the collaborative nature of the groundbreaking effects work. "When we speak of little Stuart as a real character, we are fortunate to have a style that has been determined by our director, Rob Minkoff, and Henry Anderson, who is our supervising animator. Together they have formed Stuart in terms of how he moves, what his face looks like, and how he will be delivering his lines. Of course, the actor who does Stuart's voiceover [Michael J. Fox] has a fair input into the personality of the character, and in fact, to a certain extent, some fairly large percentage of the character's personality will come from [Fox]. So it will be the actor, and Henry directing the animators at Rob's direction, and that forms the personality of Stuart.

"Rob has been very collaborative in that we've all had an opportunity to have input on each of his ideas, and as a result we all feel as though there's some sense of authorship and what comes out of the end result.

But I think that's pretty much true on almost every film you work on. If the director is secure and collaborative, then the people who work on the film get a proprietary sense about

the film on an individual basis. It's like that with us, and I'm sure it's like that with Eric [Allard] and Patrick [Tatopoulos] as well.

"And let's not forget that we have several supervisors at Sony Imageworks who are doing the technical issues of creating photorealistic fur, and photorealistic clothing. It is an arduous effort, making the outfit for a half-animatronic/half-animated mouse seem realistic, but I think that the test of the success of this project will be how well everybody collaborates, because ultimately we end up with a character that's greater than the sum of its parts, as opposed to just a great-looking set of clothes, and a nice-looking puppet, and a bunch of wheels and pulleys, and a mouse that springs forth from a computer." □

The exceptionally tall Geena Davis is not at all like the feisty, flinty heroines she has played in such films as *THELMA AND LOUISE* and *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*. Davis is, in conversation, soft-spoken to the point of shyness, and possesses an almost cuddly, small-town-girl charm.

"Yes," Davis admitted, "I'm quite unlike those women in most ways. That's why I am pleased that my part in *STUART LITTLE* is one that is a bit of a departure from them. Mrs. Little is a strong, intelligent career woman, a music teacher, but she is also a genuinely sensitive and warmhearted mother. She treats little Stuart, the mouse the Little family has adopted, as her own son. There is a very tender scene toward the beginning of the film where I am tucking Stuart into his bed for the night, and I plant this very motherly kiss on his tiny forehead. I had a good time playing that scene for a couple of reasons. The first reason was because it shows just what kind of truly loving woman Mrs. Little is, and the second, I was pleased that the audience would not find me reverting back to an assassin the way I did in *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*.

"It's not that I was disappointed with my role in that film, it's just that after playing such a demanding role, both emotionally and physically, my part in *STUART LITTLE* was almost like a vacation. Mrs. Little is first, last, and always Mrs. Little. An energetic, caring woman appears at the beginning of the film, and the same energetic, caring woman is present at the end of the film.

"*STUART LITTLE* is a fantasy, a fairy tale actually, but unlike the book by E. B. White, it deals very much with the



Not the feisty, flinty heroine, Davis termed her role a pleasant "vacation" from the type of assassin she played in *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*.

closeness of a family. The last half of the book had Stuart breaking loose from the Littles, and going off to seek his future, leaving his parents and his brother George far behind. In the film, that whole section has been eliminated. The Littles now are featured characters who have developed such a love for Stuart that when it looks like the mouse has become irretrievably lost, they do everything they can to try and find him. The book also dealt at length with a boat race that Stuart participates in. On the printed page, Stuart goes it alone, but in the film, George and Mr. and Mrs. Little are standing at the edge of the water, cheering him on.

"All this for a mouse. That is another thing about *STUART*



LITTLE that is so attractive to me. The book, as well-written as it is, concentrates more on Stuart's adventures and his personality than it does people's reactions to him. Our film still emphasizes Stuart's forays into the world of humans, but it does something else as well. The movie demonstrates acceptance of who you are and what you are about as a creature in this world. Mr. and Mrs. Little, Stuart's adopted brother George, various people that Stuart meets along the way, accept the fact that Stuart, though a rodent, has a definite place in the scheme of things, and a definite right to be exactly where he is."

Mitch Persons

HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER FROM DUSK TILL DAWN III

By Jon Keeyes

Beneath a blood-drenched sun, writer Ambrose Bierce stands against a rock. Before him, a Mexican firing-squad lift their rifles, and with a defining roar, unleash a volley of bullets into his body. And thus begins *THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER*, the third installment in Miramax Film's *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* franchise. The film hits the street on video in January from Buena Vista.

Set in 1913, the disappearance of real-life author Ambrose Bierce becomes the catalyst for this Robert Rodriguez-written prequel. What follows is a western-horror which merges two storylines, including Bierce's nightmarish journey into the Mexican desert, his discovery of the original Titty Twister bar, and the rise to power of Satanico Pandemonium, the vampire queen portrayed by Salma Hayek in the original *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*. For such an undertaking, writer and producer Robert Rodriguez sought the right director to carry on the vision of his cult hit.

P. J. Pesce was approached in July 1997. "I read the script and I thought it was kinda cool, especially the historical aspects of it and the inclusion of the writer Ambrose Bierce," said Pesce. "Robert and I got on the telephone and talked about all kinds of things, from the movies to the music, we like. He had seen this western I wrote and directed called *DESPERATE TRAIL* with Sam Elliott, and he really dug it. We talked about the first movie, about Quentin Tarantino, about Ambrose Bierce."

Director P. J. Pesce on the spaghetti western prequel.



Michael Parks plays historical figure Ambrose Bierce, Edgar Allan Poe's contemporary, in producer Robert Rodriguez' intriguing set-up for the legend.

Pesce then flew to Austin to meet with Rodriguez. "We didn't really even talk about the movie," said Pesce. "We talked about guitars, laser discs, and ran all over his house. I think his wife Elizabeth figured we were like two 14-year-old boys on a play day. Finally it was time for me to go and we realized we hadn't talked about the movie. He asked how I would shoot it, and I said my style was fairly similar to his. I shoot a lot of shots, I edit real fast, and I like John Woo. And I have a brown style, I make everything

look sepia." After viewing *DESPERATE TRAIL*, co-producers Tarantino and Lawrence Brader confirmed Rodriguez' choice of Pesce as director.

Pre-production began rolling as Pesce and Rodriguez undertook the arduous task of redefining the script and casting a film which includes ten primary actors. "The script was already written," explained Pesce, "but I feel that each director has their own style and needs to make a script their own. I asked Robert and he said to take a pass on it. More than anything else on

someone else's script, it's like re-typing it. That way you know every tiny thing and it makes you question blocking, and why people are doing things in every scene, and the logic behind actions. This gave me the ability to have a dialogue with Robert about changes to scenes.

"It was the choosing of most actors where Robert and I were working most intensely together," he continued. "The very first actor that was hired was Michael Parks [*FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*]. That was something that Quentin really wanted. I met with Michael and thought this guy had a real quality. After that, I would send Robert tapes of who I wanted and nearly every actor we agreed on. It became a very good collaboration and Parks was the perfect choice as Ambrose Bierce."

To ensure accuracy to the film, Pesce then delved into western history: "I did a ton of research on Ambrose Bierce. I get fanatical about doing research, especially doing a historical movie. I watch these westerns on TV and I'm screaming at the directors wondering if they have ever even looked at an old western picture—nobody had long hair. There was a reason why barbers made a very good living. How hard is it to go study some pictures to get your actors looking proper? I had even gone to the point of finding out that Ambrose Bierce's drink of choice was brandy, so I rewrote a dialogue exchange where Ambrose is asking for a drink at a bar. It makes for a weird little moment in the movie because you are seeing how Ambrose Bierce would have really been."

DIRECTOR P. J. PESCE

“Robert [Rodriguez] and I didn’t talk about the movie. We talked about guitars, laser discs and ran all over his house. His wife probably thought we were like two 14-year-old boys on a play day.”



Ara Celi plays Esmeralda, the Hangman’s daughter of the title, who becomes vampire Satanico Pandemonium, played by Salma Hayek in the original.

The cast is a well-rounded international ensemble that pits a group of unlikely allies against the vile creatures of the Titty Twister bar. Bierce’s storyline follows his journey into the desert accompanied by two uptight missionaries played by Rebecca Gayheart (*URBAN LEGEND*) and Lennie Loftin (*THE QUICK AND THE DEAD*). The second storyline—and basis for the film’s title—follows Johnny Madrid (Marco Leonardi of *THE FIVE SENSES*), as a bandit who is saved from the noose by Esmerelda, the hangman’s daughter (Ara Celi of *DONUTS*). Kidnapping Esmerelda, he is pursued into the desert by the Hangman (Temuera Morrison of *ONCE WE WERE WARRIORS*). The chase leads them to the Titty Twister, where his group is forced into an alliance with Bierce’s group to fight the vampire horde. The only original cast member to return is Danny Trejo as Razor Charlie, playing bartender to Sonja Braga (*KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN*), the current operator of this gothic-western bordello of blood.

For any person—Pesce included—creating a western is a task many directors aren’t thrilled with: “I didn’t realize when I did *DESPERATE TRAIL* that in doing a western there are tons of little arcane skills that very few people have anymore. Really, the only people who still have these skills are here in Hollywood. For *HANGMAN’S DAUGHTER* we wasted so much time doing six-ups, which is having a team of horses pull a wagon. We were shooting in South Africa where there were no horses that had

been trained to pull a wagon. Our wrangler had to train 10 or 12 horses. And the other thing they didn’t have—on the entire continent—was a stagecoach. We literally had to go out to this equivalent of a western steakhouse that had an old, prop stagecoach sitting out in front, and that’s what we had to use. In order to make it safe enough, we had to weld hundreds of pounds of iron to the thing to keep it from falling apart. And of course now these newly trained horses can barely even pull the thing so they’re tiring out faster. It was a nightmare, and the damn thing still broke.

“As for the western town,” continued Pesce, “we built the entire town out in the middle of nowhere. That was a major logistical, technical achievement. And we built the entire Titty Twister set in Capetown in a warehouse. It was crazy. All of the real film studios in Capetown were booked so we had to build this set in a warehouse on the outskirts of town, and there were days when we would have to stop shooting because a garbage truck was rolling by or a family of birds in the rafters would start tweeting.”

Pesce’s final obstacle was blending the finer nature of the western with the true ele-

ment that drew people to *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* in the first place: horror. “I had never done a horror movie before, but I’m a huge western fanatic,” he said. “I relied a lot on Greg Nicotero from *KNB Special-Effects* for the horror. Greg was there with me, so I would ask him how others would do something particular. I talked with Robert about what the movie should feel like, and the two movies we relied on were Dario Argento’s *SUSPIRIA* and then *JACOB’S LADDER*, because we didn’t want to rely heavily on CGI but wanted everything to just feel and be creepy. I think I achieved my goal.”

To round out the fine blend of two genres, Pesce complimented the film’s “warm, brown look” with what he considers to be great music and sound. “The music is so awesome!” Pesce exclaimed. “There’s tons of real old Mexican pieces. We basically used only one or two bands because we found these archival CDs and it

Pesce directs Marco Leonardi as Johnny Madrid, a bandit saved from the noose by Esmeralda, who joins with Bierce to fight the vampires (right).



sounds so amazing and very authentic. It gives great atmosphere to everything, especially the bar. Some of this stuff almost sounds medieval. And the sound is just incredible! We’ve done a great job with the mixing, so you hear the bullets whizzing by your head and the explosions are really exploding in the room. It’s great and completes the feel of the film perfectly.” □

BICENTENNIAL MAN

By Frederick C. Szabin

Prolific author Isaac Asimov had many times been approached by Hollywood to set his classic science fiction stories to film, but he had successfully resisted for decades. In the 1980s Roger Corman did produce NIGHTFALL, but the results were far from satisfactory. Now, with \$100 million, two studios and no less than seven producers, Disney's Touchstone Pictures (along with Columbia Pictures, which will handle foreign distribution) opened THE BICENTENNIAL MAN December 10 as their major holiday picture, with Robin Williams playing Andrew, a free-thinking robot who spends 200 years trying to find his humanity.

The original short story was written by Asimov in 1976 and first anthologized in *Stellar Science Fiction #2*.

Now his tale of Andrew, the robot who rebuilds himself to be human, has been given the Hollywood multi-million dollar treatment with director Chris Columbus (MRS. DOUBTFIRE) at the helm, screenwriter Nicholas Kazan (who penned FALLEN, REVERSAL OF FORTUNE and PATTY HEARST, and is the son of legendary director Elia) writing the adaptation, and Williams heading a cast that includes Sam Neill (JURASSIC PARK), Embeth Davidtz (ARMY OF DARKNESS), Wendy Crewson (FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON) and Oliver Platt (BULWORTH).

Williams' robot look is provided by Oscar-winning makeup artist Greg Cannom (MRS. DOUBTFIRE), with music by Oscar-winning composer James Horner (TITANIC), and production design by Norman Reynolds, whose previous work includes such impressive titles as MISSION IMPOSSIBLE, ALIEN3, RETURN OF THE JEDI, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK.

It was the initial script, which was constantly rewritten during production, that had attracted Reynolds to the project, as well as the fact that it was written by the offspring

Designing the future for Isaac Asimov's robot Robin Williams.



Production designer Norman Reynolds lamented that the original script's centuries-spanning storyline was cut back due to budgetary restrictions.

of the director of ON THE WATERFRONT. That first screenplay went all out in its depiction of time spanning two centuries, and Reynolds relished the opportunity to attach himself to such a project.

"One of the problems with the job I do is that getting the initial script doesn't necessarily mean the film is going to be like that or, indeed, that the period is what it says in that draft," said Reynolds, whose involvement in the film began July, 1998. "The first draft getting that far into the future really intrigued me, but we didn't actually go that far. I liked the way it was written. It's certainly a very interesting subject and it was the best script around that I had read. And I liked the idea of Robin Williams being the lead. He is such a talented man. My impression at that time was that we were going to go for it at one point in a really big way, but there were financial problems. In point of fact, we did stop shooting at one point. There was a hiatus. We tore down

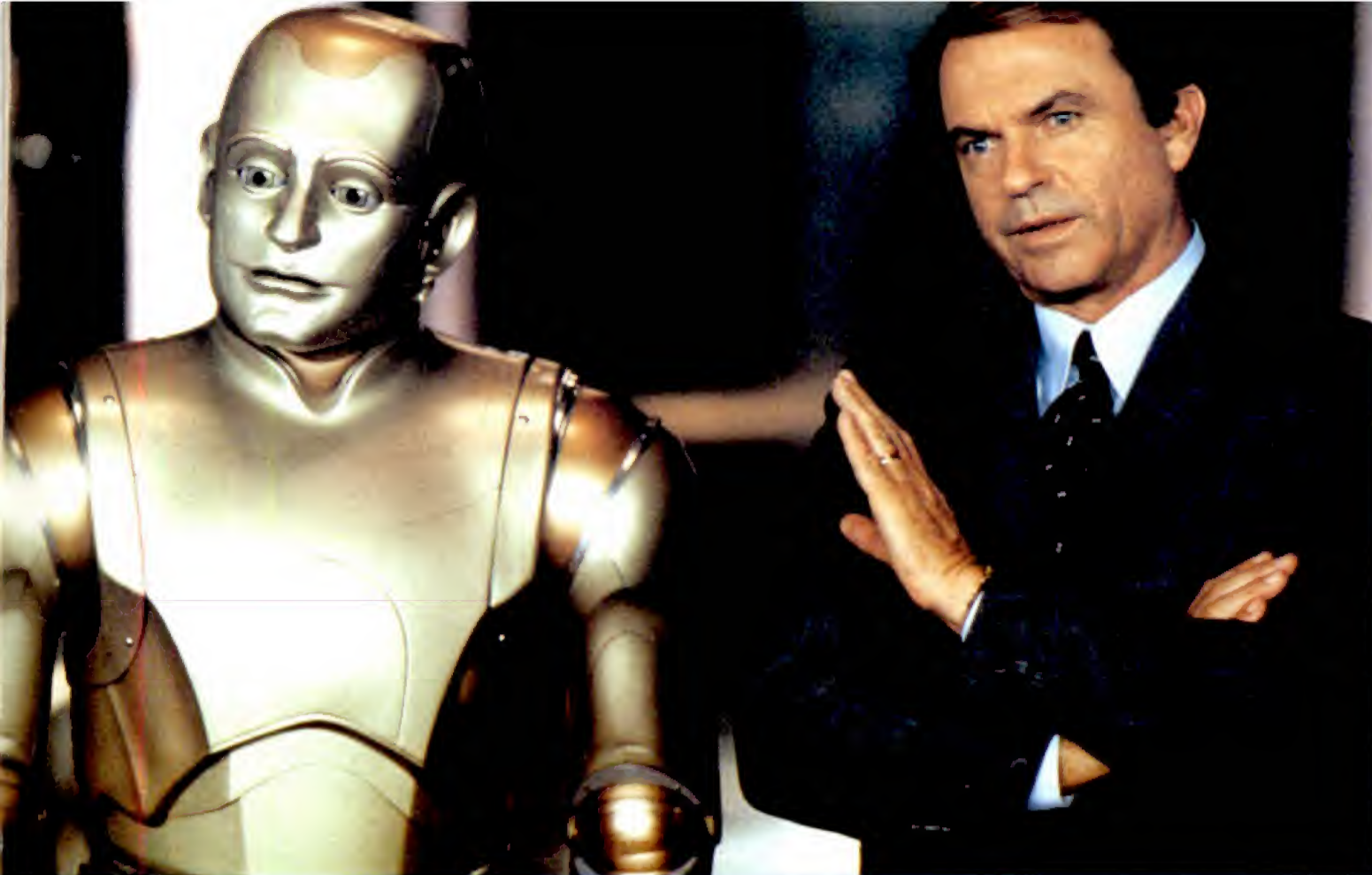
three sets and started again weeks later because there was a big financial hiccup, but they got over it and we proceeded on a sort of cut back budget.

"When I came back a few weeks later," Reynolds continued, "we sort of started again. I think there was a lot of people stretching their muscles during that time, whatever the politics were. I don't become involved in those problems. I'm only really interested in what the thing looks like. It just seemed to me that there was a flexing of muscles going on, but finally all of the parties saw some sort of common sense. It all worked in the end. There are such vast amounts of money that people are being paid. I don't know whether that sort of thing had a huge effect on the proceedings. I'm sure it did. At one point it seemed like that was the end [of the production]. Suddenly all these various people got together and worked something out. That seems to be par for the course for these big budget movies, really. I mean, \$100 million for one movie! My goodness! Disney makes more than one movie, so there must be a lot of money in

that particular pot."

Like Asimov's story, Kazan's original script began in the future, and progressed 200 years from there. But after the budget debacle was ironed out, much of that futuristic atmosphere was lost, with the story starting pretty much in the present day. This caused Reynolds and his production team to lose certain designs.

"I was initially into things like—to give you a simple example—vehicles," he said. "People didn't have private cars. What you had was places where you'd take your vehicle, use your swipe card or whatever the equivalent of that would be, punch in where you wanted to go, hop into this thing and you'd be taken there. You would then leave that vehicle there, do what you wanted to do, then go back to where you dropped off that vehicle, by which time there would be other vehicles in use, so the whole transport system was going to use a whole different approach. The personal owning of vehicles



Williams plays robot free thinker Andrew, in makeup designed by Greg Cannom, with Sam Neill as Sir.

was sort of out. That, coupled with elevated skyway systems and all that sort of stuff. That was the kind of road I was going down. To do that means making various vehicles for people to drive around in. We did actually start on one or two of those things. There's one in the picture, I think. But then, when you scale back on stuff, everything else is sort of scaled back. I think you either have to go for it or not. It was decided that we couldn't do that for, I suppose, budgetary reasons."

With the budget suddenly being a hindrance, and the script constantly changing, Reynolds also found himself working with a director whose very specific vision for the film centered more on the foreground than the background.

"Chris Columbus is a very nice man, a charming guy," said the designer. "But I think his main thrust is with the actors. Other directors are as concerned about the sets and backgrounds as with the actors. I have the impression that you can't really separate the two. The right background certainly helps the actors, it helps everything. It is a part of the scene. I don't think it should dominate, but I think you should be aware of it. I think, as far as Chris is concerned, a very close shot of the actor is sufficient for the scene. That's really where he was coming from. He's much more concerned with the actors than the thing they're standing in front of.

"Some directors can, almost without you being aware of it, thread the action through the backgrounds, incorporate both things so the texture of what you're looking at becomes part of the scene along with the actors," Reynolds continued. "I've done a number of things with Steven Spielberg, who tends to do that. He has a way of making the set or back-

ground become an integral part of the scene, of weaving it in with the action and making it all work as a whole. If he has the stuff there, then he's going to utilize it to further the scene, but I think Chris is much more the actor's man."

Shooting progressed on location in northern California's Bay Area until finishing in mid-July, 1999. One element that has entered Reynolds's professional life is the advent of computer-generated imagery. It has now become important to prepare not only live-action sets and miniatures, but to develop drawings and sketches of important scene elements, then hand that over to CGI experts, who print out a picture of what they believe it should look like and send that to the art department for approval. This is how much of *THE BICENTENNIAL MAN* was created, which is a working relationship that Reynolds has had to get used to.

Williams and Hallie Kate Eisenberg as Little Miss, a robot in search of his humanity, based on the short story by Isaac Asimov.



“I suppose my biggest disappointment is the lack of vehicles. I was really pushing for them. In America cars are more important than people.”

Production designer Norman Reynolds

"One of my favorite sets in the film," he said, "is, oddly enough, one of the least futuristic. It's the apartment for the character that Embeth Davidtz plays. One of the things that interested me about the movie was that there was a great variety of different sets and periods. The California architects Green and Green built the basic house we chose for location. The interior reflected their work, and was a bit Frank Lloyd Wright-ish. It was an interesting interior, and that was one of the many different types of architecture that I'm involved with, from the stainless steel, circular interiors with lots of glass up to an Italianate set—which is the one I'm talking about now—which has lots of columns and arches. I wanted it to be like that, just to give another facet to the movie. It just appealed to me at the time; it's not a huge set, but I think it had certain qualities that I liked. We had a very big set for the World Legislature, where we had 100 senators sitting in this place and Robin gave a couple orations. It was a big set, slightly futuristic. I think the diversity of the architecture is one of the things that interested me most. *THE BICENTENNIAL MAN* was a big mixture of styles for me, and I enjoyed that.

"I suppose," the British-born Reynolds continued, "my biggest disappointment is the lack of vehicles. I was really pushing for them. [He laughed.] I think this is especially true in America; cars are more important than people. Some of those great American cars of the 1930s—if you have a street full of American cars of that period, the man in the street knows it's in the 1930s or thereabouts, and it's a great stamp on the scene; *This Is The Thirties*, I think, equally as well, if you're going into the future and you have futuristic vehicles you think, *This Is The Future*. If you don't have very much else in the scene, you're really spelling it out that you're in the future. That was, I think, and I'm going to be proved wrong, something that would have helped the picture enormously. But then I'm always complaining. You have to keep trying to do what you think is the right thing. That's what makes you get up every morning." □

TOY STORY 2



The return of Buzz Lightyear. Tim Allen, who voiced the character, urged a theatrical release.

How Pixar's high profile video sequel went to

By Lawrence French

Right after TOY STORY debuted in 1995, there was almost immediately talk of a sequel to the first-ever CGI feature, but the creative staff at Pixar resisted the idea. "It was the last thing we wanted to do," explained Lee Unkrich, the editor on TOY STORY, who served as one of three co-directors on TOY STORY 2, (along with Ash Brannon and John Lasseter). "We felt there were other stories to tell so why make a movie with the same characters when there's a whole uncharted territory of other stories and new characters. But we saw the big impact TOY STORY has had on the culture. It's really lasted and we finally realized we had a great thing on our hands. We had all these great characters the world had embraced, and we thought it would be sad if they only got to live in one 90-minute movie. So after some time had gone by, we said, 'We enjoyed creating these characters. We really liked them. Why not try and give them a great adventure that would be a worthy follow-up to TOY STORY?'"

Initially, when the sequel went into pre-production three years ago, the plan was to make it as a less expensive, direct-to-video title, using many of the same computer models and sets

that had already been created for TOY STORY. That would allow it to be completed in two years, and premiere in video stores for the 1998 holiday season. And because John Lasseter was already heavily involved in A BUG'S LIFE, Ash Brannon, (a supervising animator on TOY STORY), was promoted to director. Ralph Guggenheim returned as producer. The idea was "to make a sequel that would be measured by a gentler yardstick," explained Pixar chairman Steve Jobs. "Most of the team that created TOY STORY was already working on A BUG'S LIFE, and even with a handful of TOY STORY veterans in key positions, we thought it would be almost impossible to recruit a second crew as talented as the original TOY STO-

RY team."

However it soon became apparent that the storyline created by John Lasseter, Pete Docter, Ash Brannon and Andrew Stanton was so strong it didn't make much sense to rush the project out in two years. "We always felt the story had the potential to be just as good as the original," said Lasseter, "but, at the time, all of Disney's animated sequels [with the exception of THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER], had been made as direct to video titles. So the marketplace determined that decision, and also the schedule, because I wanted to direct this after A BUG'S LIFE, but if we waited until A BUG'S LIFE was finished, before we started developing ideas for TOY STORY 2, it wouldn't come out for three

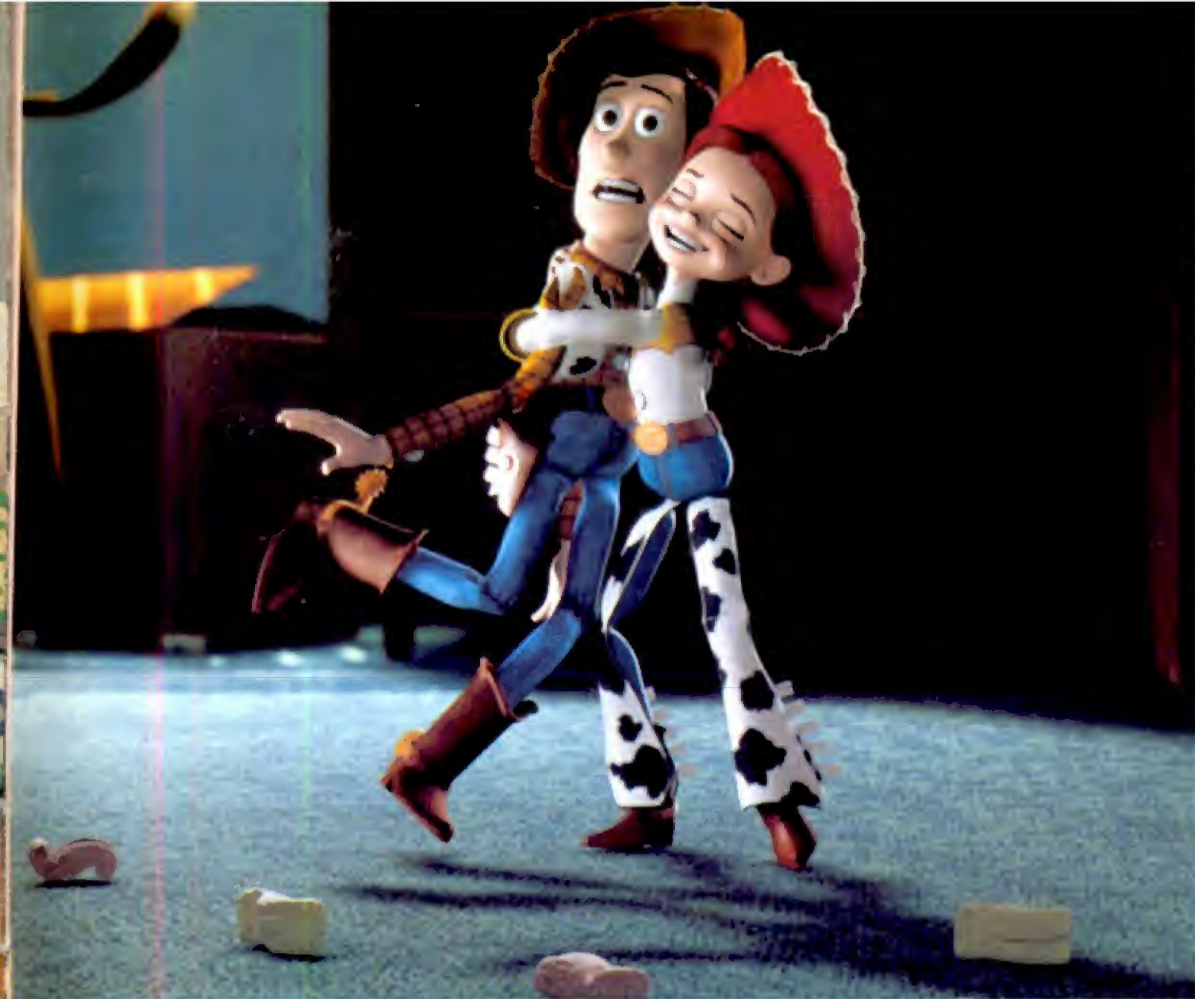
or four years and the franchise would be cold. So [Disney] decided to do it as a direct-to-video title, that we could do in parallel with A BUG'S LIFE. I was still going to be heavily involved as executive producer and we brought in Ash Brannon as director. But we were going to be making it ourselves. It wasn't going to be produced overseas, and when everybody, including the actors, started to see how the story was coming out, they all said, 'Let's make it a theatrical release.'"

In fact, Tim Allen, who returns to voice Buzz Lightyear, claims to have been instrumental in convincing Disney executives to make the switch to a theatrical release. Ironically, the switch meant Allen would have to eventually return and re-do much of his voice recording (as did most of the other actors), when the story was re-vamped halfway through the production.

Around June of 1997, as initial animation was getting underway, Colin Brady (an animator on TOY STORY), came on as a co-director. At the same time, longtime Pixar employee Ralph Guggenheim felt the need to make a change, and left as producer. "I left because I was interested in pursuing other areas, like entertainment on the Internet," explained Guggenheim. "I'd been at Pixar for 11 years and felt I was ready for a

Woody in the hands of toy collector Big Al. Pixar tackled realistic human forms in CGI and beefed-up the dramatics to appeal to an adult audience as well.





Woody (Tom Hanks) gets a new gal pal, Jesse, the cowgirl (Joan Cusack).

movie screens instead.

change. Helene Plotkin and Karen Robert Jackson, [the production manager on TOY STORY], took over and I hear they're doing a wonderful job." Then, a few months later, when the decision to switch to a theatrical release became official, more changes were made. "Instead of scaling down the budget, now we could make it look as good as possible," exclaimed Lasseter. "So we started revamping the story. The biggest production change was switching aspect ratios, because it was being produced in the video aspect ratio of 1.33 to 1, and now we had to rework everything for a theatrical aspect ratio of 1.85 to 1. Then, when I finished A BUG'S LIFE, I stepped in to help as director, and brought with me Lee Unkrich, as a co-director, because we had an awful lot of work to do to get the film out before Thanksgiving. These movies are so complex and there's so much work to do, it really helps to be able to delegate and have more than one director."

In the interim, co-director Colin Brady left the production, and when A BUG'S LIFE wrapped, many of the key creative people who had been working on that film were now free to re-join Lasseter on TOY STORY 2, including art director Bill Cone, director of photography Sharon Calahan, and An-

drew Stanton, who did a revision of the screenplay. By the time Lasseter and his new team came on to bolster the production, it was already January of 1999, leaving them less than a year to meet the release deadline. "When we joined the production, very little animation had been done," noted Unkrich, "but all the character models and settings had been designed and were ready to go, so that's really when we started to animate and make the film." Lasseter added that, "it was always part of the plan to have a staggered production, once it was decided to make it a theatrical release. We knew a big part of the production would happen after we finished A BUG'S LIFE. Then, we had some story revisions that put us a little bit further behind, but that always happens, because we're always tweaking the story until the very last minute. It's very exciting, because everyone is pulling together and putting in long hours. Everyone really believes in the project."

No doubt a big reason for the high morale on the project was the depth of emotion the animators could express with their characters. After all, it isn't every G-rated animated film where a character (Woody) comes face to face with his own mortality and another (Jesse), faces the traumatic loss of her

CO-DIRECTOR JOHN LASSETER

"Woody has a choice: he can be a collectable and live forever, but he'll never be played with again. It's like a human getting a chance to live forever, but never being loved again."

purpose in life. It sounds more like the stuff of Bergman and Antonioni.

"The story deals with some pretty deep emotions," remarked Lasseter. "What Woody goes through is getting caught up with this idea of being a collectable toy, and losing sight of what it means to be a toy that's played with. And this time it's Buzz who has to come to him and say, 'You're a toy, you're not a collectable, you're a child's plaything!' In the beginning, Woody's arm gets ripped, and he gets worried about tearing more, because he thinks Andy won't ever play with him again. This really becomes a deep fear for him, and that's the underlying theme of the movie. By being valuable as a collectable, he's given the opportunity to live forever. Therefore, being afraid of dying, Woody has a choice: he can be restored and sit in a glass case and live forever, but he'll never be played with again. It's like a human getting a chance to live forever, but never being loved again. It's a really heavy choice for Woody to make."

"It's something that the kids won't necessarily get," observed Lasseter, "but the adults will, and that's one of the things we strive to do in our movies, to put layers in there for adults, as well as for kids. It's that heart and pathos and deeper meaning that takes these movies to another level. So adults can go and find it to be entertaining and enjoyable for 90 minutes, as well as kids of all ages. That's really the goal."

Another challenge was how to make the movie more than just a replay of ideas from the first film. "As an audience member, I wouldn't buy the characters going through the same kinds of issues we dealt with in the first film," admitted Lasseter. "They've been there and done that, and you want the

characters to be intelligent, so they don't keep doing the same old thing. So we looked at this notion of toys being alive and found other aspects of that to pursue. We thought, what if Woody was a valuable toy and was collected, and the next thing you know, we were off in a whole new adventure, that is very believable and interesting."

With the main group of characters already familiar from the first movie, it freed-up the Pixar story team to concentrate on developing several interesting new characters, including Bullseye, Woody's horse; Jesse, the cowgirl; and Stinky Pete, the prospector.

Of course, no matter how well done it is, being a sequel means that inevitably some people will be unhappy with the movie in comparison to the first film. "There's nothing we can do about that," noted Unkrich. "We just want to make the best movie we can make, and feel fortunate that so far, after putting so much of ourselves into these films time-wise, and emotionally, we've gotten to enjoy the fruits of our labors." □

TOY STORY and BUG'S LIFE director John Lasseter, who stepped in to co-direct when the project got revamped.



BEING JOHN

Director Spike Jonze and scripter Charles

By Dan Persons

Produced under the aegis of Gramercy Films and then passed on to USA Films as a result of Barry Diller's purchase of the studio, BEING JOHN MALKOVICH should considerably amuse anyone seeking off-beat entertainment. Scripter Charlie Kaufman previously logged work for such obscure but cult-worthy TV shows as THE DANA CARVEY SHOW, GET A LIFE and NED AND STACEY. "The initial thing that I was writing about was this married man who falls in love with somebody who's not his wife," said Kaufman. "It's a



Catherine Keener and co-worker John Cusack meet on the 7 1/2 floor. Left: Jonze and cinematographer Lance Acord film inside a set of Malkovich's body.



grounded, real problem that exists in the world, so maybe that helps give the movie the sense of reality it has."

What Kaufman eventually came up with was far from grounded: a tale of Craig Schwartz (John Cusack), a talented (if somewhat self-obsessed) puppeteer, who condescends to take a day job in a bizarre office building and stumbles upon a doorway that allows anyone entering to spend fifteen minutes in the mind of renowned actor John Malkovich (John Malkovich, natch). Abetted by office-mate—and unrequited love—Maxine (Catherine Keener), who almost instantaneously finds a way to capitalize on the situation by offering time-shares in the Malkovich noggin to those hungry for a taste of star-power, and his wife, Lotte (Cameron Diaz), who begins to question her given gender and to lust for Maxine after one trip through the magic

doorway, Craig begins a bizarre adventure that sees him warring for possession of the Malkovich soul, all the while laying plans to fulfill his own goal: to become the most famous puppeteer in the world.

Written five years ago, Kaufman's script became something of a legend in Hollywood—garnering enthusiastic praise for its wicked humor and dizzying plot-twists, and simultaneously amassing notoriety as a story so bizarre that it was essentially un-filmable. That notoriety held, until REM frontman Michael Stipe and music video director Spike Jonze came to the rescue. Noted Jonze, "I'd never heard of the script's reputation [as being un-filmable,] so I never even thought of it like that. I just thought of it as really smart, funny writing."

With Stipe and Stern co-producing and Jonze directing, there remained one major question: would Malkovich be willing not only to participate in a project that satirized his high-profile reputation, but participate under a director whose career to that point consisted of a raft of well-received videos and commercials for the likes of REM, The Beastie Boys, Sprite, and Nike?

Said Jonze, "We tried to come up with names. Charlie and I, every now and then when we were waiting to see whether he'd do it or not, we would start getting depressed thinking, 'What if John Malkovich doesn't want to do it?' We tried to make a list, wrote down fifty names, and none of them really excited us. So we just talked ourselves back into it: 'Y'know what? He'll

do it.' We just went on believing he would do it, somehow."

"Spike was the single-man mission who flew to France and convinced John that, as a first-time director, he could deliver," said Stipe. "It took balls of steel for [Malkovich] to accept this role, particularly at the hands of a first-time director. He's a brilliant actor. He's in this movie, sending himself up. I don't know that there's a precedent for this in terms of someone playing himself and doing himself so viciously and so arrogantly. His performance is so unafraid and audacious."

All in a day's work, according to Malkovich himself: "I do have a fairly thick skin. I didn't

really think that much about making fun of me, because I sort of felt it could be anybody. I mean, it made fun of me very well, but I'm sure [Kaufman] could do that to a lot of people. I really responded to the script as a whole. I just thought it was a great piece of writing. Most scripts are so hackneyed and so sort of cobbled together; they don't express a personal vision. It didn't really have holes. You were expecting on every page that it'd have to fall apart eventually, and it never did."

While Kaufman grounded his story in the believable milieu of New York City, he threw both cast and crew a curve when he placed the location of Schwartz's down-scale job on the 7 1/2 floor of the fictitious Mertin-Flemmer building. Built—according to a weird, stagey orientation video that Schwartz views on his first day of work—as an industrialist's love-offering to his "small-person" wife (a legend that the script, further muddying the waters, then suggests is apocryphal), the 7 1/2 floor contains all the appointments to be found in any modern office building, but at a compact ceiling height of five feet, three inches. And while the film's fictional characters had very little trouble adjusting to the constraints of their workplace, the real-life participants found the whole situation a more daunting challenge.

"The first day, I just laughed the whole time," admitted Mary Kay Place, who plays off-kilter receptionist Floris. "Then I started sitting down a lot. It was funny how each

MALKOVICH

Kaufman on filming their off-kilter fantasy.

person would assume a very specific posture; everybody makes unique adjustments for the height. You saw all these variations in body language and posture. The poor crew, they were there all the time, and it was difficult for them."

Added Orson Bean, who plays Schwartz's mysterious boss, Dr. Lester, "They had a chiropractor there. They needed it. He was there on the set, off to the side with a table, giving adjustments to the guys who were lifting the heavy lighting equipment."

There's no documentation that either Keener or Diaz availed themselves of the chiropractor's services, although by the end of the shoot they probably would have appreciated the favor. Although far from a Schwarzenegger slam-fest, the film did offer up considerable stunt-work in a bizarre sequence in which Lotte chases Maxine through Malkovich's subconscious. According to Keener, both actresses were up for the challenge: "We wanted to [do the stunts]. We really didn't have to, but we wanted to. We really volunteered. We did a lot more, actually, than is in the movie; we shot for about a week and a half. We had two amazing stunt women who did the big, splat, cartoon falls. But we did a lot of our stuff."

Added Diaz, "We were standing on the roof of a bus, driving around, going 35 miles an hour. We were jumping down head-first through a hole in the roof with kids in the seats, running down a ways, falling out of the bus while the bus is moving and our heads are this close to the street. It was so much fun. Every day, you go to work, and it's something you've never done before."

She wasn't kidding. When Diaz wasn't chasing Keener through the murky depths of Malkovich's fears and anxieties, she was obligated to get cozy with animal-loving Lotte's diverse range of housepets. Nowhere did the experience get more close and personal than in the scene where a jealousy-crazed Craig imprisons his bound and

"It took balls of steel for Malkovich to accept this role," said producer Stipe. "He's doing himself so viciously and arrogantly. [He's] unafraid and audacious."



Jonze (l) rehearses on-set with Malkovich, who agreed to the send-up after reading Kaufman's bizarre script, which Hollywood had pegged as unfilmable.

gagged wife in a steel cage with a chimpanzee. "My scenes with the chimps were some of the most cherished experiences of my life," said Diaz. "They're unbelievable. They're us. They're just better. I spent a lot of time with them sort of bonding and playing in the trees."

As for the hazards of working with the purportedly mercurial Malkovich, Jonze held that the reality came nowhere close to the legend. "He was super-easy for everybody to get along with on the set. He made everybody feel comfortable. The first day he showed up on the set, we'd already been shooting for five weeks, and everyone on the set felt busted, like, 'Oh my God, he's really here!' We were making the movie, talking about, 'Malkovich! Malkovich! Malkovich!' and then all of a sudden, he's there! But he so quickly got into making fun of himself, he made the cast and crew feel comfortable with playing with the idea of Malkovich."

And now it's the audience's turn to play

with the idea of ordinary people playing with the mind, body, and very essence of John Malkovich. But, cautions Cameron Diaz, audiences should take the evidence of their eyes with a very large grain of salt: "This movie is not John Malkovich. Obviously, the things you see him doing are the things that everyone does. We've all had the breakfast coffee, we've all eaten the same dry toast. John Malkovich is playing a character called John Malkovich, obviously an actor."

Added Keener, "I think that people do think it's a depiction of John Malkovich. But that's great. That's John. This movie is so about John making fun of himself, and whether you know that he's doing that or not is irrelevant. He doesn't care."

The producers, of course, will definitely care how the public embraces BEING JOHN MALKOVICH. For Stipe, the film has all the elements he feels have too often been lacking from more commercial productions. "In music, in books, in film, in every-

thing that comes to me as a fan, I like stuff that I can dance to and not think about, and wash the dishes to. I also like stuff that has something going on underneath, that you can lock into if you so wish to think more about it. This film is very funny. It's a very easy watch, if you just want to laugh and go along for the ride. There's also a lot to think about underneath, and that's definitely what appealed about the script. Spike, to his credit, really played it down. None of it is didactic or in your face. It's very subtle."

"When [Cameron and I] got cast," admitted Keener, "we would call each other every time there was a new discovery. We'd have another revelation: 'Oh, and this...!'"

"And we're still calling each other," added Diaz. "After completion, we're still calling each other, going, 'And you know...? Did you see that? Did you get that?' It's incredible. It's like what they were saying: 'There's only 14 original scripts in Hollywood, and this is the 15th.'" □

THE SIXTH SENSE

Director M. Night Shyamalan on his horror masterwork.

By Presley Reese

Philadelphia-based writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (pronounced Sha-mah-lahn) sold his spec script for *THE SIXTH SENSE* in just a single day, a rarity in Hollywood, according to producer Barry Mendel. "Having known Night [Shyamalan] for many years, I was in the unique position of being able to read the script before anyone else in town," said Mendel, whose debut film was *RUSHMORE*. Mendel personally took the screenplay to David Vogel, then-president of Buena Vista Motion Picture Group. "David dropped everything he was doing that Monday morning," said Mendel. "He canceled meetings in order to read the script and, upon finishing it, he was on board."

Veteran producers Frank Marshall and Kathleen Kennedy were the next production entity to respond with interest in the script. "It's unusual to get a spec script that is so well written," said Marshall. "Night referred to it as *ORDINARY PEOPLE* meets *THE EXORCIST*."

Shyamalan said his aim in making the film was to capture the sense of horror of films "like *ROSEMARY'S BABY*, *REPUSSION* and *THE OMEN*. It's reality-based fright. It comes from the fears of real people, real children and real adults; fears of loss, the unknown, of having a sixth sense about what lies beyond and fears of not understanding those intuitions.

Shyamalan's film shows a surprisingly assured hand for one who is only 28 years-old. "Cinematically speaking," noted Marshall, "he has an uncanny knack for knowing what works, whether it's the angle of a particular shot, the look of a particular set, the creation of dramatic tension, or knowing which actors have what it takes

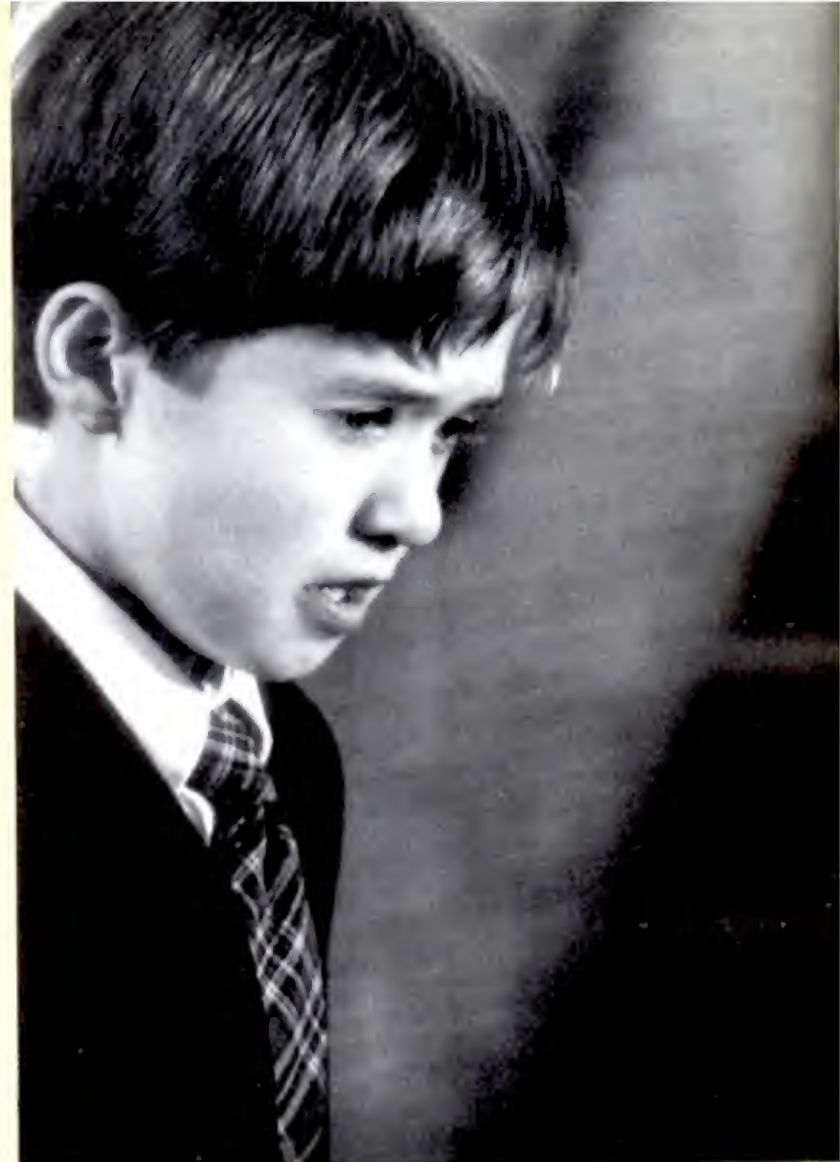
to bring his characters to life. It was amazing and exciting to work with a young man who is so sure of himself and so confident with the material. I think Night had his own sixth sense about this project and all of us trusted it implicitly."

Noted Shyamalan, "I wanted to shoot in Philadelphia, not just because it's my hometown and I live there, but because there is no other American city that possesses the haunting beauty and history that Philly possesses.

"Sometimes in your life, you just know what's right," added Shyamalan. "Therefore, you can't compromise the situation. I got who I wanted and it's all up there on the screen. *THE SIXTH SENSE* is the best example of collaboration without compromise I've ever experienced."

Shyamalan cast Bruce Willis against type as psychologist Malcolm Crowe because he saw an Everyman quality in Willis that was evident in his performances in such films as *PULP FICTION*, *IN COUNTRY* and *NOBODY'S FOOL*. "Bruce's performance is so poignant in this film," said Shyamalan. "There were times when we were shooting when I would look through the lens or at the monitor and I didn't even recognize him. As Malcolm, you can see him struggling to fig-

Shyamalan, writer and director of the landmark chiller, shooting in Philadelphia.



"I see dead people," troubled child Cole Sear (Harley Joel Osment) tells Dr. Crowe (Bruce Willis).

ure out what's happening around him. You watch and hope that he'll be redeemed. It's a fascinating performance, filled with subtle humor and pathos...definitely some of his best work as an actor."

Quipped Willis, in his trademark wisecracking manner, "Night is a very disturbed individual. Seriously though, he assigns a lot of meaning and mysticism to the fact that he simply wrote a really brilliant script. There have only been three scripts that I have ever read in my career that I immediately knew I wanted to do, and *THE SIXTH SENSE* was one of those three. It has a real balance of dark and light moments and a great balance of normal and paranormal events in these characters' lives.

"Honestly," added Willis, "I think Night would have gotten any number of leading men to respond to this script the way I did, yet I feel very fortunate that I was the one asked to be included in the cast...a cast that not only includes two very talented actresses,

Olivia Williams and Toni Collette, but also includes Haley Joel Osment, the most amazing child actor I've ever seen. I rank this kid up there with the best adult actors I've worked with over the years. He is immensely talented and smart and is completely unaffected by his talent. W.C. Fields would be eating his words if he met Haley. Plus, he's a pretty good little golfer." Willis is not alone in his praise for Osment. "Talk to anyone associated with the making of this film and they will tell you the same thing; Haley Joel Osment is a one-of-a-kind find, an 11-

HORROR CLASSIC

Breeding ground for nightmares, childhood is a fertile feast of fear.

By Thomas Doherty

During a summer of synergistic corporate hype (THE PHANTOM MENACE), Virgin trans-Atlantic hype (AUSTIN POWERS), dead auteur hype (EYES WIDE SHUT), and Internet generated hype (THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT), THE SIXTH SENSE was that rare creature: an authentic sleeper, a word-of-mouth wonder and out-of-nowhere gem discovered by audiences, overlooked by critics, and written off by the pre-publicity geniuses at Disney. Low key, atmospheric, utterly mesmerizing, it blew away the bloated competition on the strength of an instantly iconic performance and mind-trapping plot. Among a glut of assembly line dreck forgotten by the time you located your car in the parking lot, THE SIXTH SENSE stuck around and left enough of a residual chill to, well, make the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

The opening sequence wastes no time in lunging for the throat. In the antiques-laden home of upscale child psychologist Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis), his adoring wife (Olivia Williams) retrieves a bottle of wine from the basement, shaking off a sudden case of the creeps in the dank interior. A bit tipsy, the happy couple prepares for a tussle in the sack, but an uninvited guest has broken into the bathroom, a deranged former patient (a lacerating cameo appearance from a skeletal Donnie Wahlberg), tormented by visions that the doctor did not cure. After unveiling a look into his tortured psyche, he shoots Malcolm before turning the handgun to his temple.

The next fall, the physically recovered but spiritually shattered doctor watches as a small boy, with the too symbolic name of



Osment, an 11-year-old acting sensation who "completely blew me out of the water," said Shyamalan.

Cole Sear (Haley Joel Osment), exits a doorway, a patient he needs as much as the patient needs him. Perhaps by ministering to a lonely, disturbed boy with symptoms similar to the suicide victim he failed, Malcolm can repent for his earlier misdiagnosis. The plot will pivot around the doctor's probing questions, the boy's terrible secret, and the mutual desire each has to confide in each other. Cole is a hard case, afflicted with morbid visions: a bloody teenager, a vomiting girl, a cadaverous grandmother. "I see dead people," he finally confesses to the shrink in

a tagline that will go down in Hollywood history.

Being the original breeding ground for nightmares, childhood is fertile territory for the horror film, a place where fears of the unknown and knowledge of the known first rattle around in the psyche. THE SIXTH SENSE will be added to a select list of horror classics fueled by the terrible isolation and confusions of childhood, films like THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER (1955) and THE SHINING (1980), a tradition not to be confused with THE BAD SEED (1955) or THE OMEN (1976) where the child is the incarnation of horror for adults. For Cole, apparitions under the bed are only half of it: his outcast state as he walks to school, sits alone at his desk, or attempts to mix at a birthday party are at least as scary as the huddled corpses he encounters in his bedroom.

Not since David Lynch's ERASER-HEAD has Philadelphia looked so netherworldly, a city steeped in the murky past, where colonial corpses haunt the courthouse and hang from the school corridors. Orchestrating the gentle atmospheric of

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Noted Shyamalan of Willis, "It's a fascinating performance, some of his best work as an actor."

year-old as intelligent and seasoned as any Hollywood acting veteran," Willis said.

Added Shyamalan, "I've worked with kids before. We had strong child actors in WIDE AWAKE, for example. The role of Cole, however, was uniquely complex. It was even more important to find the right actor. "I had seen kids from New York and Philadelphia and was getting tapes from all over the country. I was physically and mentally exhausted from the search, but eventually I went to Los Angeles to look, although, in the back of my mind, I kept thinking that was going to be a waste of time. Then Haley came in, wearing a little Oxford shirt and he struck me as a cute, sweet little kid.

"I just leaned back and Haley started the scene and it was like I had never heard the scene before," Shyamalan said. "All of a sudden, every word was perfect. He finished the scene and was crying, and I was crying and all I could say was, 'Who are you? Where did you come from?' Haley started laughing as he wiped the tears away. Then he did two more scenes for me and he performed every line, every scene just as I wrote it in my head. He completely blew me out of the water!

"I then went back to New York and told the casting director that I don't want to make the film without Haley," the director said. "It was the weirdest thing that ever came out of my mouth but I was being honest. I meant it. Then we brought Haley in to read for Frank Marshall and Kathleen Kennedy who have done their share of movies with kids. By the time Haley finished the scene, everyone was crying again, and we all agreed that the search was

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HORROR CLASSIC

continued from page 61

horror, where the room temperature plummets and breathe condenses, director M. Night Shyamalan seeks to induce a continuous low-intensity shiver, not to make your eyes bug out in wonder or even to make you scream in fright. Eschewing slick montage or CGI razzmatazz, he favors the matter of fact intrusion of spectral horror into the film frame: kitchen cabinets thrust open, a shadowy figure cutting in from the side of the screen, an arm reaching out from beneath a bed. Likewise, Tak Fujimoto's roving, inquiring cinematography—so hypnotic in *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*—eerily expresses the hallucinatory, foreboding quality of Cole's eye on his supernatural reality.

At the second act curtain, Malcolm tells Cole to confront his demons. Performing an act of courage worthy of the toy warriors the boy collects to protect himself, he attends the funeral of a deceased girl who needs to testify from beyond the grave. In a film trafficking in the supernatural, the creepiest moment exposes a terrible act of real horror recorded on a videocamera.

Of course, the fact that 11-year-old Haley Joel Osment delivers the most thrilling performance of the summer is the chief talking point in the terrific word-of-mouth generated by *THE SIXTH SENSE*. Intense but not melodramatic, still a child despite his adult knowledge, Osment registers the interior life of a young boy who is scared witless but smart enough to know he is not crazy, yet. Surely also much of the delight derived from Osment's *tour de force* is how magnificent it looks against the summer's other big kid-centered narrative, *THE PHANTOM MENACE*, where the stiff Jake Lloyd so palpably failed to deliver the goods on screen.

In Bruce Willis, Osment is well met. Due to his cocky, smirking persona in *MOONLIGHTING*, Willis has been much maligned throughout his acting career. Since converting

“Childhood is fertile territory for the horror film, where fears of the unknown and knowledge of the known first rattle around the psyche—it breeds nightmares.”



Osment as Cole, confronting his demons by performing an act of courage worthy of the toy warriors he collects to protect himself.

nonbelievers with his role as the noble fighter in *PULP FICTION*, Willis has honed a canner, more mature presence, minus the glib self-satisfaction. Osment is getting a lot of well-deserved praise, but Willis' concern for the boy, his pain at his failure as a doctor, and his anguish at his failing marriage may be the true emotional center of the film.

As Cole's caring mother, Toni Collette is in her own way as tormented as her son. Beset with a child who is either very talented or beyond the pale, she is an aching portrait of maternal warmth, bewilderment, and fear. For once, too, the interior of the family's working-class house actually fits the economic class. In a Hollywood screen world where every child seems to live in Spielbergian splendor, the home reflects the economic means of a working Mom juggling three jobs. Of course, Cole's real father is absent, allowing Malcolm's paternal intervention to complete the nuclear triad.

Where most horror in the

1990s has been cynical and nihilistic, *THE SIXTH SENSE* is deeply humanist, unabashedly sentimental, and openly romantic—in the need to cure the sick and to comfort the living, in the loving care of the surrogate father and the real mother, in acknowledging the presence of the dead in the lives of the living. Ultimately, Cole is not cured of the gift that he thinks makes him a “freak;” he has learned to manage it and use it for good. He will neither be driven to madness like the first boy, nor will he exploit the gift to hurt others (despite succumbing once, when he dredges up the humiliating past of a teacher who taunts him).

Interestingly, the two most exciting films of the summer of 1999—*THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* and *THE SIXTH SENSE*—are both horror films, and whatever your personal ranking of first and second place, both are true originals that confirm the adage that stars and FX are no substitute for characters and plot (for further confirmation, see *THE HAUNTING*). Like *BLAIR WITCH*, *THE SIXTH SENSE* is suggestive and atmospheric, burrowing into the space between the ears.

Though at this late date most viewers will have already discovered the end-reel hand-to-the-forehead revelation, it would still be a criminal offense to pull back the curtain. Let's just say that it is a twist worthy of O'Henry or, more likely, Ambrose Bierce. Unlike so many plot twists, though, this isn't an unfair ambush. You're not tricked; your eyes are opened to a fact that in retrospect makes perfect sense. The sleight of hand magic act that Malcolm performs for Cole earlier in the film is a metaphor for the prestidigitator of the director/screenwriter M. Night Shyamalan. He keeps us looking at one hand while the other is pulling the wool over our eyes. It is a measure of the excellence of *THE SIXTH SENSE* that the response from audiences is not resentment at being fooled, but wonder and appreciation at being able to experience this unique and magical film. □

SIXTH SENSE

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over. It's done. Haley is Cole.”

“When Haley came in he claimed the part as his own,” said producer Frank Marshall. “It was the same feeling Kathy and I had on *E.T.* and a couple of other movies that we've done. Haley went on to prove himself during production. He was always very serious about the work. He did his homework and understood the lines and the character and the relationships. He doesn't just say the lines, he looks people in the eye and he understands everything he is saying, so you believe him. You believe that he is haunted and disturbed and suffering.”

Noted Shyamalan, “In all great movies there is some element of magic. When I say ‘magic’ I mean something that goes way beyond what's on the page...something you couldn't recreate if you tried. Haley is that ‘magic’ of *THE SIXTH SENSE*.” □

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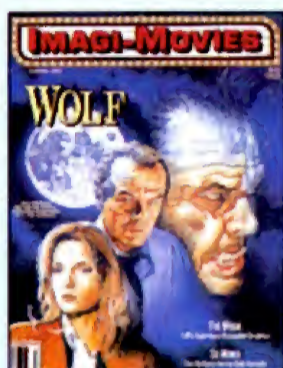
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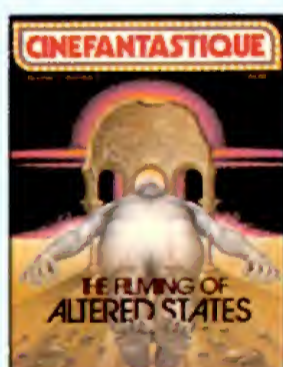
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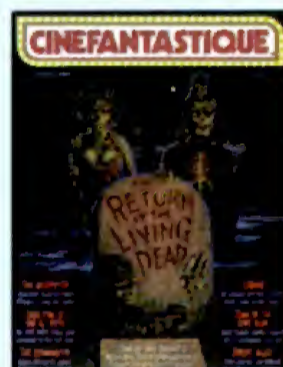
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